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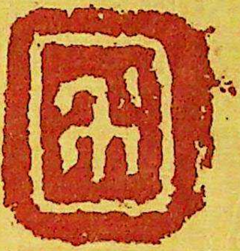
NANDALAL BOSE



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AN ALBUM OF

NANDALAL BOSE

WITH A BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

SANTINIKETAN ASRAMIK SANGHA
CALCUTTA 1956

Published by
Sm. Pratima Gupta
On behalf of Santiniketan Asramik Sangha
47 Southern Avenue, Calcutta-29

Price Rs. 20

Printed by S. N. Guha Ray, at Sree Saraswaty Press Limited,
32, Upper Circular Road, Calcutta-9

FOREWORD

I am happy to learn that the Santiniketan Asramik Sangha of Calcutta has decided to publish a representative collection of Sri Nandalal Bose's pictures. Nandalal Babu has been the doyen of artists in India and I should like to pay my tribute of respect and admiration to him. I hope he will live long and add to the treasures he has already given to the nation.

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

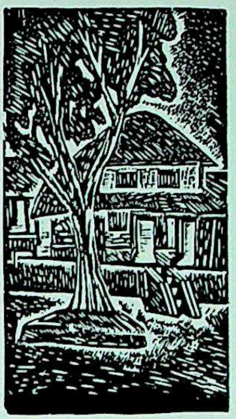
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In 1953 the Santiniketan Asramik Sangha held an *arghya-dan* ceremony in honour of Acharya Nandalal Bose. At that time the Sangha decided to organise, on a large scale, an exhibition of the artist's works and later to publish a representative album of his paintings. Accordingly, a most successful exhibition of Nandalal's works was held in March-April, 1954. Simultaneously with the exhibition, the planning of the proposed album was taken in hand. The opportunity was taken of the large collection of paintings at the exhibition to make a preliminary selection which was finalised with the artist's approval. It is impossible to overrate the debt which both the exhibition and the planning of the album owed to the help and guidance of the late artist, Ramendranath Chakravorty, who was himself a pupil of Nandalal and whose untimely death last year caused such a great loss to the realm of art in India.

The publishers gratefully acknowledge the kind response of the Government of India and the State Government of West Bengal to their request for financial and other aids towards the publication of the album. But for the subsidies granted by these Governments it would not have been possible to issue the album at its present price.

Many kind friends, including the owners of the Raja Praphullanath Tagore Collection, have helped us by loaning pictures in their possession, for which we thank them sincerely. We would put on record our appreciation of the assistance given us in various ways by Visva-Bharati, the Government College of Arts and Crafts, Calcutta and the Ananda Bazar Patrika.

We must also acknowledge the co-operation we have received from Sree Saraswaty Press Ltd. The Colour Plates were made by Sree Saraswaty Press Ltd.
Lastly, it is a pleasure to refer to the interest shown in this undertaking and help given to it by so many members of the Santiniketan Asramik Sangha from far and near. There is no question of giving them thanks, for they are us.



The Mud House of Kharagpur (*Lino-Cut*)

In the absence of an authoritative book of reference or a comprehensive collection on permanent view in a public gallery or a representative album, comparatively few persons have an adequate idea of the range of the artistic output of Nandalal Bose's genius, and especially of his work in later life. Yet, almost every picture by Nandalal could be regarded as having the significance, directly or indirectly, of a landmark in the history not only of the 'Bengal School' but of modern Indian art as a whole. For, in a long and prolific career as an artist, Nandalal's work has been distinguished by an astonishing variety in terms of idea, style, technique and treatment. In fact, it would be impossible to provide a full view of his genius in a single volume. As reflecting the course of the unfoldment and evolution of Nandalal's art, the view available from the present album can be regarded as that of an outline only. The pictures included here may, however, be taken as representative of Nandalal's art from the standpoint of aesthetic realisation as well as of technical achievement.

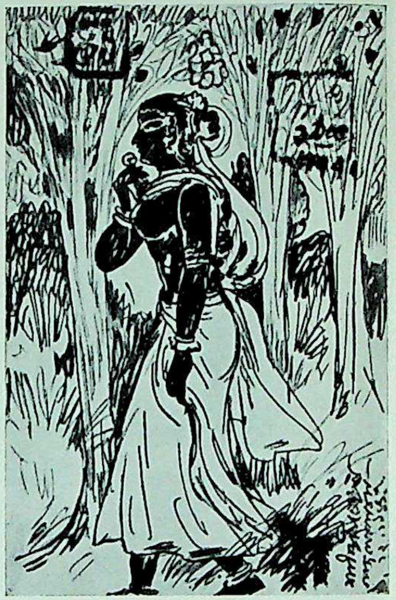
Some notes are given about the paintings but not about the sketches. These are but a selection from an immense storehouse of material in all kinds of style and technique, carrying echoes from all periods of the artist's life. Apart from their intrinsic artistic merit, the sketches, chronicling moods and personal experiences, give us a feel of the environment of the artist's major creative work in the respective periods.

As regards the biographical note that follows, it does not pretend to be elaborate. The organic links picked up present a picture which is coherent only in a limited degree. What is given here is rather a series of allusions—to circumstances, experiences and influences in the artist's life which have, more or less obviously, some bearing on his creative work.

NANDALAL'S ANCESTRAL HOME WAS AT BANIPUR, A VILLAGE ON the west bank of the river Hooghly, about ten miles to the south of Calcutta. He was born—on December 3, 1883—at a village called Kharagpur in the district of Monghyr, Bihar, where his father Purna Chandra Bose was in charge of a *zamindari* forest office under the Darbhanga Raj. In course of time Purna Chandra rose to be Manager of the Darbhanga Estate. He was a man of great dignity of bearing—a most methodical and hard-working head of a joint family of about a hundred members, among whom his own children numbered twenty. He left a diary in which the details of the family's affairs were meticulously recorded.

Nandalal lost his mother, Kshetramani, when he was about eight years old. But the impress she left on her son's mind was considerable. In fact, as Nandalal affectionately recalls, hers was the first significant personal influence to touch the artistic instinct in him. Kshetramani was a gentle-spirited woman of a kindly, rather self-effacing, disposition. She was very good at making things—like designing moulds for preparing sweets, making small catechu dolls, artistic needle-work on *kantha* patterns, etc., all these being accomplishments for women brought up in the traditional culture of an old-time middle-class Hindu household. When his mother, or perhaps an aunt, was doing one of these things, the child Nandalal would be sitting by, absorbed in watching beauty and form taking shape in the work of dexterous fingers. A rival attraction was provided by the potters' quarter in the village. Here Nandalal would spend many an hour—an eager, entranced spectator of the transformation of clay into dolls or images of gods and goddesses. Most wonderful of all, the clay obeyed when he ventured to try his hand on it. The child was filled with a sense of overwhelming joy as he saw a bit of shapeless clay gradually take form within his own fingers. What play could be more exciting than that of making with one's own hands little *Durgas*, *Kalis*, *tazias*, etc.? About this time it also became a hobby with Nandalal to hunt magazines for pictures in order to copy them.

Throughout his life Nandalal has been especially sensitive to natural environment, and undoubtedly the most important formative

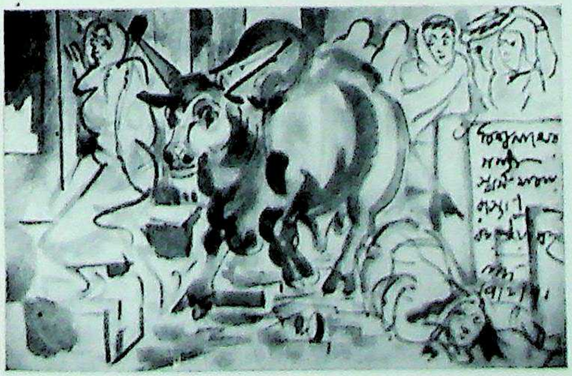


DREAM GIRL : *Collection Indulekha Ghosh* influence in his early life came from the natural background of the place where he spent his days of boyhood and adolescence.

This place, Kharagpur, was set in a landscape of quiet beauty. Except on the south the sky-line was formed by low hills of a bluish hue, offshoots of the Vindhya Range—which on the northern side came within a mile of the village. This lay on both sides of a stream called Mani which, barring the short flood season, was fordable practically throughout the year. All around the village were paddy fields stretching far and away and changing in colour from season to season. Kharagpur was 12 miles from the nearest railway station at Bariarpur. Yet, the village had some importance. Firstly, because the *zamindari* office for the *pargana* which issued licences for removal of forest products—mainly timber, bamboo and sawai grass—was located here. There was daily concourse of traders, contractors and labourers interested in this business. The village lay on the main approach to the railway station for the people of the farther interior. So there was a lot of people passing through it, most of them on foot of course. There were a few horse-riders, but the typical conveyance for those who could afford it was the *palki* borne by four or more men on their shoulders. Also, there would be an occasional *push-push*—a kind of man-drawn cart.

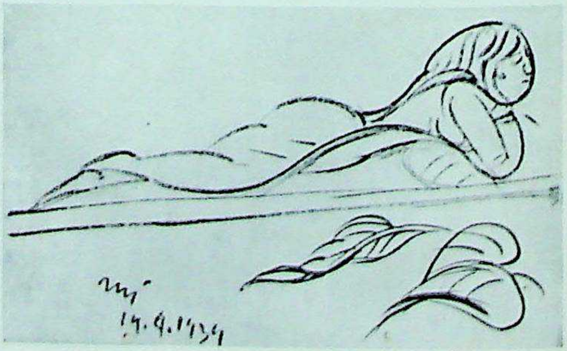
What went on inside the *maqtab* where Nandalal was sent to learn the Three R's had little attraction for the child who was bored if not oppressed by the school-room's drabness and stuffy atmosphere. His eyes and imagination constantly sought escape through the window which permitted a glimpse of the rural scene outside. From his earliest years the aesthetic sense has been a powerful influence in Nandalal's life. Even as a child his interest could not be kept long engaged in activities carried on in an unattractive environment. On the other hand, if there was something in the environment or some attendant factor in a situation that appealed to his aesthetic sense his interest could be kept engaged in a subject towards which he had no natural inclination or towards which he felt even positively apathetic. For instance, at school he never liked mathematics, in fact he dreaded it. But later when he was a student of the General Assembly's Institution in Calcutta, if there was any class which he

HAZARDS OF VISVANATH GULLEE : *Collection Indulekha Ghosh*



would not miss, it was the mathematics class. The explanation lay in the attraction which Nandalal felt for the mathematics teacher—the well-known Gouri Sankar De. The personality of Gouri Sankar, including his manners and attire, had a moral-cum-aesthetic appeal for Nandalal who would never absent himself from his class if he could help it. There was no evidence of similar scrupulousness in attendance to the classes on other subjects—subjects which Nandalal had previously liked more than he liked mathematics or which at least he had disliked less. The neat figure of the grey-haired Gouri Sankar dressed in spotless white—in a close-necked coat and dhoti that did not come more than an inch or two below the knees—exercised a kind of spell on Nandalal. There was also in Gouri Sankar's method of teaching and dealing with the students a preciseness, a quality of orderliness which made an impact on Nandalal. For Nandalal, the mathematics class under Gouri Sankar was rather like an aesthetic experience and, as such, held his interest though neither by nature and far less by previous nurture was he attracted to the subject itself.

To return to the days at Kharagpur. After finishing with the *maqtab* Nandalal joined the local "middle-vernacular" school. Here the medium of instruction was Hindi. The Hindi learnt in childhood both at school and outside—even at home a lot of the local Hindi dialect must have been used along with Bengali—went into Nandalal's blood and has remained there. Even now when he is under an impulse to express some strong emotion, which is not often because he is terribly shy, it pours out naturally in Hindi. In telling stories to his children and later to his grand-children his habit was to use Hindi. In his childhood Nandalal absorbed not only Hindi and the scenery about Kharagpur. The peculiar tang of the human contacts made in those days also went into his being and can be sensed even now whenever there is a stirring of memory. Take, for instance, the occasion some years ago of that visit by a villager who appeared one morning at Santiniketan, asking for Nandalal Bose. The visitor, in turban and with a stout bamboo stick in his hand, looked a typical Bihari villager,—apparently a long way off from the world-renowned Director of Kala-Bhavana. Yet when he was taken to Nandalal it was



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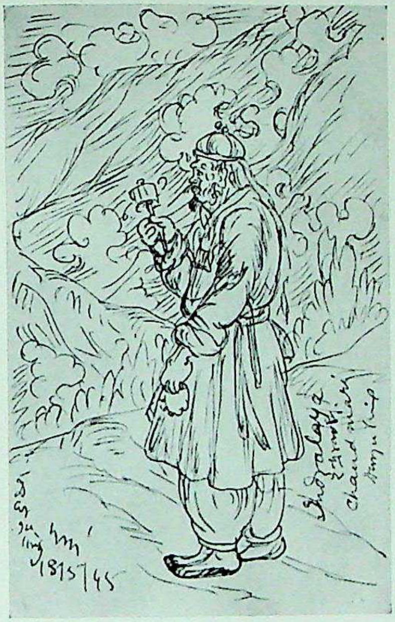


Buddhist Lama : *Collection Jamuna Sen*

like a meeting of long-lost brothers. For the whole of that day Nandalal took leave from his students and his work and gave himself entirely to his boyhood friend from Kharagpur. The happy pair spent the whole day off in talking, laughing, and eating together. There was not the least trace of constraint on either side.

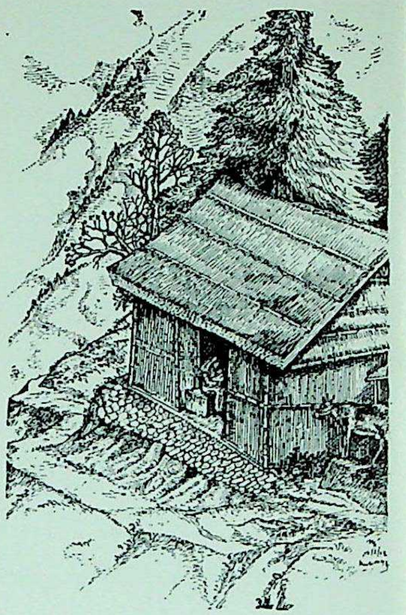
At Kharagpur, as a boy, Nandalal heard of a painter in a nearby village. He searched him out. The fellow was a crank. He lived by painting pictures for the villagers. One day Nandalal took to him painting materials—paper, paints and a brush—and asked him to make a picture. The artist shook his head—'I paint only on a wall.' When the paper was fixed on a wall he said, 'I have no use for that brush and those paints.' He made his own paint by mixing soot with water and made a brush by rolling up a piece of cotton rag. Work began, of course, after a payment. Then at one point it stopped. Nandalal asked the artist, 'Why have you stopped ?' That madman of a village artist answered, 'That's enough for one pice.' So another pice was paid and the painting proceeded, but it was not long before another pice was demanded and paid. And thus it went on till the picture was finished. The crazy fellow did not know that he had done more than paint a picture for the boy. Long afterwards, in the execution of his famous 'Natir Puja' series of frescoes in Cheena Bhavana at Santiniketan, Nandalal made a most successful use of the rag brush.

On completing the course of the "Middle" school at Kharagpur, Nandalal was sent to Calcutta for further studies. His father, Purna Chandra, was now posted at Darbhanga, the headquarters of the Raj estate. He had bought a house in Calcutta so that the boys of the family might stay there for their education. As already stated, the family seat at Banipur was not very far from Calcutta. Nandalal used to go there every now and then to spend a few days away from the din and bustle of the city. Not that Banipur was to remain entirely quiet. The rural scene was being rapidly transformed, as a big jute-mill was going up in the neighbourhood. In its wake came all the attendant features of a 'mill area'. That was a period when the key-note of 'industrialization' here was naked exploitation. The living conditions of the workers made an agonizing impression on Nandalal who was a frequent visitor to the 'coolie lines', especially when the workers were in trouble. The European management's policy reflected one of the typically hateful and vicious features of foreign rule inasmuch as it tried to keep labour divided by encouraging communal discord between Hindu and Muslim workers, pushing this policy on occasion to the point of actually inciting riots. The evils of foreign rule and the ugly side of 'industrial civilization' were thus brought home to Nandalal through personal observation. About this time he was in close contact with a friend and relative—Debabrata Bose—who was a follower of Sri Aurobindo. Debabrata came frequently to Nandalal's residence in Calcutta and discussed with him the country's unhappy condition. Nandalal's young mind was deeply agitated by these discussions to which may be traced the beginning of his sympathy for the revolutionaries of Bengal.

In Calcutta, Nandalal first joined school and then, after passing the Entrance Examination, entered college. About this time his marriage took place. It was of course arranged by his guardians. The bride—Sudhira—was the handsome daughter of Prakash Chandra Pal. The Pals were well-to-do and influential. They, too, lived in Kharagpur, only on the other side of the Mani which ran across the village. The head of the family was Prakash's father. He had plans of a doctor's career for Nandalal.

But already the course of Nandalal's life was set in a different direction. Though his name was still on the college rolls, his interest in college work steadily declined. Money meant for the purchase of text-books was spent in other ways, for instance, in buying illustrated magazines after hunting the old-book shops. It was during this period that Nandalal made a collection of prints of Raphael and Ravi Varma. An interesting thing to note about this period was a characteristic response of Nandalal's mind to the appeal of English poetry. Alongside Wordsworth's poems in a college text-book Nandalal made drawings to illustrate the poet's imagery. Long afterwards when Sir William Rothenstein heard about this he wanted to see the illustrations. But nobody knew where the book had gone.

By now Nandalal knew what he must do. He had decided to join



HIMALAYAN COTTAGE
Collection R. N. Chakravorty

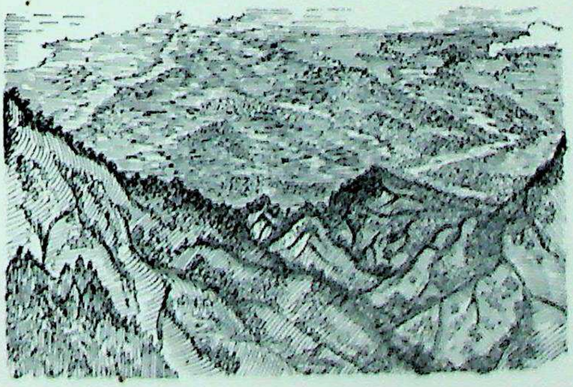
Abanindranath Tagore's class in the Government School of Art, as the present Government College of Arts and Crafts was then called. He wrote to his grandfather-in-law that he had lost all interest in the general academic studies for a degree and career and asked for his permission to join the Art school. The people at Kharagpur already knew enough about the state of Nandalal's so-called studies in Calcutta to realize that it would make little practical difference whether the permission sought was given or not. So it was given. And, of course, Nandalal had already acted in anticipation.

E. B. Havell was then Principal of the Government School of Art and Abanindranath Tagore Vice-Principal. The name of Havell will forever shine in the history of the aesthetic revival in modern India. Havell arrived as Principal of the Government School of Art, Madras, to teach the method and ideal of Western art which the Indian mind was so eager to learn. But Havell proved too great a man to encourage wrong values and he soon set himself to draw the attention of the authorities and the Indian public to works of Indian art and started his movement for the revival of the handloom industry. After some time he came to Bengal as Principal of the Government School of Art, and here he began his work in right earnest till he fell ill and was compelled to leave India.

He set himself to restore the position of the village crafts in the art-life of this country. With this end in view he tried to remodel the then existing Art School and opened a new department of crafts, particularly the handloom. He brought various craftsmen from all over India and made it compulsory for the art students to learn stencilling, paper-cutting, etc., though to work under a mere artisan was regarded a great humiliation by many of the students. Havell brought a hereditary artist, a man by name Lala Iswariprasad, for the students of his painting class. The attached gallery of the School was full of copies of European masterpieces. Havell had them all removed and brought in their place Indian miniature paintings of Mogul, Rajput and other schools. All this was very shocking to the "cultured" people of that age.

Though his own works do not conform to any of the traditional Indian schools of painting, Abanindranath is rightly recognised as the

Kurseong Scene : *Collection R. N. Chakravorty*



reviver of Indian art in the modern age. To quote from Benode Behari Mookherjee, "By dint of his wonderful talent he (Abanindranath) effected a fusion of Western and Oriental techniques and evolved a new style of painting. The problem of absorbing the Western technique without detriment to the character of their own art-tradition, has been a serious one to the modern artists not only in India but also in China and Japan. The success with which Abanindranath solved it is perhaps unique in the history of modern Oriental Art. . . . It is the influence of Abanindranath that has made us (modern artists of Bengal) modern. And now that we have become modern we turn to understand the Indian classical art. It must be clearly understood that we have not become modern through the pursuance of the old. When in England, indeed almost everywhere in Europe, sheer academic jugglery in light and shade was being practised in the name of art, it was an achievement of no mean order for an Indian artist to have risen above the lure of naturalism and to have visualised the ideal of real creative art." Abanindranath's early training was in the Western technique reflected in his works up to 1895. In 1897 Havell introduced him to some of the best specimens of the Mogul and Rajput schools which lent their influence to Abanindranath's art during the next following years. During 1901-1902 Abanindranath became acquainted with modern Japanese artists and their works. This happened through the agency of Count Okakura who had met Vivekananda in Japan and followed him to India. Okakura believed a nation's art to be the deepest expression of its soul. To him the significance of his own country, Japan, became real through its art. He believed, once her art-mind was awakened, India's whole being would be pulsating with life. Okakura also believed 'Asia is one.' He came to persuade Vivekananda to go to Japan on a prolonged visit. But Swamiji's health had already broken down. On returning home Okakura sent Hori San to study Sanskrit at Santiniketan and the artists, Yokoyama Taikan and Hisida, to Calcutta to consort with Indian artists for mutual benefit. Abanindranath studied Japanese art with Taikan and Hisida and took from them practical lessons in drawing in Japanese style.

The most important of all contacts for his future as an artist began on that day in August, 1905 on which Nandalal, seeking admission into

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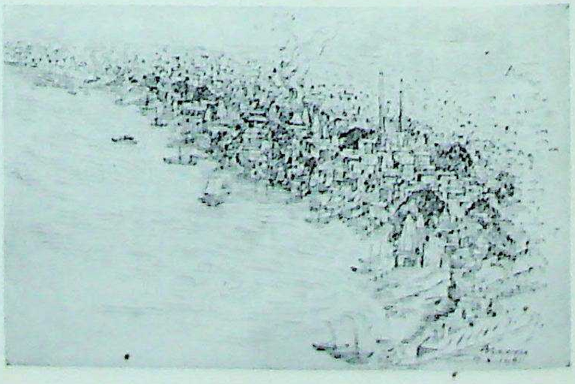
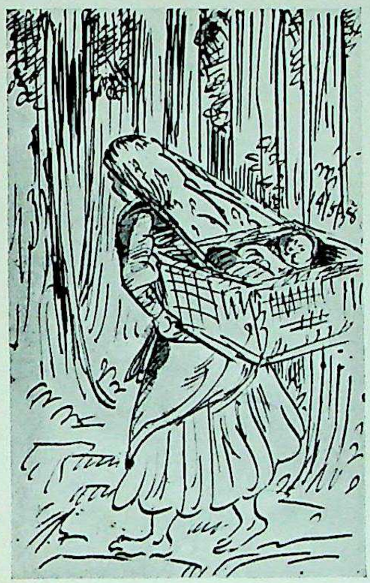




Hill Girl: *Collection Jamuna Sen*

the Government School of Art, was taken by a student whom he had known before, to Abanindranath Tagore in his room at the School. Presenting Nandalal to the Master, the young interceder said, 'Please, Sir, you must take him in.' Abanindranath looked up. A slim youth, curly-headed and of a smooth dark complexion, was standing before him with a bundle of papers in his nervous hand. But there was no mistaking the sparkle of intelligence in the handsome face and the bright eyes.

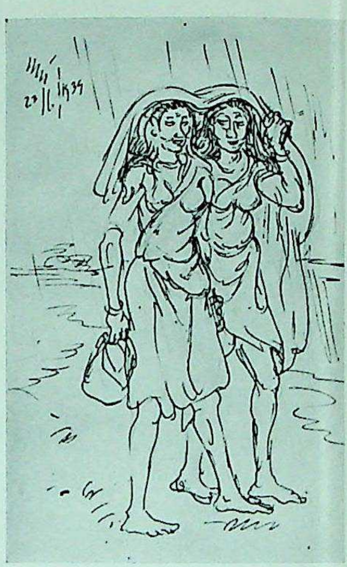
The first question was a playful teaser: 'A truant from school ?' Nandalal gravely answered, 'No, Sir, I have finished school and have even read in a college. I can prove this by certificates.'

But the certificates that really mattered were in the bundle—a copy of Raphael's *Madonna*, some crayons, copies of Greek statues and several specimens of still-life painting. Abanindranath took Nandalal to Havell. Havell inspected the pictures. He preferred the original pieces and was particularly pleased with the work *Mahashweta*.

So Nandalal became a student at the Art School. Willy-nilly his guardians had to agree but their misgivings and anxiety about Nandalal's worldly future were not easily set at rest. At last, carrying the family's fears, Nandalal's father-in-law one day arrived in Calcutta and went straight to Abanindranath. Abanindranath tried to convince him that it was possible to live and maintain a family on 'Art'. Finally, Abanindranath said, 'Please have no fear. I accept all responsibility for Nandalal.' With this assurance, Prakash Chandra returned home with an easy mind.

There was no 'schoolmastering' in Abanindranath's class. Its keynote was a spirit of dedication common to both the teacher and his pupils. A feature of the class was cultivation of the association of literature with art. Discourses on historical subjects and the *puranas* were arranged for the benefit of the students, who found sources of inspiration in them. Evidence of this is provided by Nandalal's works of that period—Siddhartha with the wounded duck in his lap, Death of Dasharatha, Kali, Satyabhama, Krishna, the *tandava* dance of Shiva, Sati, Shiva-Sati, Bhishma taking vow, Gandhari, Dhritarashtra, Sanjaya, pictures on themes from Betal-Pancha-Vimshati, and so on.

The *Siddhartha* showed a marked originality of conception. It was done entirely in the decorative style. When Abanindranath wanted to correct the anatomy Havell said, 'No, let it remain as it is.' Havell had understanding of the essence of the decorative principle in Indian art and he realized Nandalal's genius, especially in the perspective of that art's tradition.



In the Rain: *Collection Indulekha Ghosh*

When Nandalal was a student at the Art School Sister Nivedita (Miss Margaret Noble) visited it one day in the company of Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose. Nandalal's work made a great impression on her. Not that she refrained from criticising what she considered defects; but on the whole she was deeply moved. Before leaving she very earnestly asked Nandalal to see her at her residence. After this, the young artist was a frequent visitor at Nivedita's place. Nivedita's contribution to the movement for the regeneration of Indian art must be given a very high place among her great and astonishingly varied services to this country. Her inspiring contact with and unfailing interest in Nandalal's work right up to the time of her death were of great value to the artist. About Nivedita Nandalal has said, 'There was a rare shining grace in her countenance. It exuded a glow of purity and strength. Whoever saw that face even once could not forget it in life. I can never say enough about the encouragement I received from her. When she died it was like being deprived of the presence of a guiding angel. It was Sister Nivedita who introduced me to the ideas of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda.'

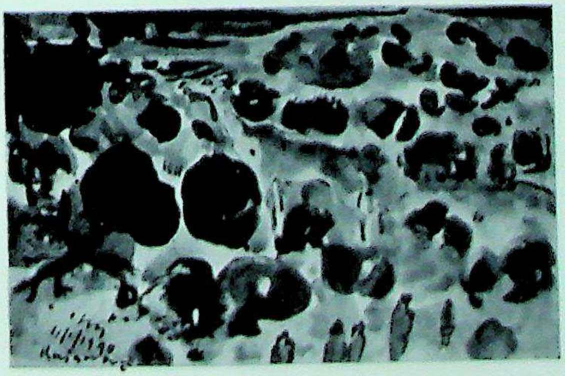
Towards the end of 1908 Havell had to retire from the Art School and leave for England on account of his health. He was succeeded by Percy Brown as Principal. Abanindranath continued as Vice-Principal. Brown was a stricter disciplinarian than Havell and undoubtedly the previous régime had permitted a somewhat casual attitude towards the rules. One of the earliest things Brown did was to make it clear that he would insist, for example, on punctual attendance both by students and teachers. In order to impress this on all concerned he ordered that the gate should be closed at 10 o'clock so that those who came late would be shut out for the day. On the very first day of the promulgation of this order Nandalal was to find the gate closed before him. He asked the gateman to inform

Abanindranath of his predicament and the Vice-Principal had personally to come to the gate to help the late-comer gain admittance.

Nandalal was a student at the Art School for five years. When he finished the course the authorities of the Art School offered him a post which he declined. For he had a call from Abanindranath for work at the latter's house at Jorasanko where a rich variety of jobs awaited him. He assisted in the preparation of a catalogue of Abanindranath's famous 'Tagore Collection'. This included miniatures of the Rajput and Mogul schools, book illustrations of the Persian schools, colour prints from China and Japan, illustrations of palm-leaf manuscripts of the Buddhist schools, Nayika and Ragini pictures of Rajputana, Shaiva and Vaishnava paintings of the Hill School, metal sculptures of Nepal and Tibet, bronzes from the South, wooden and stone images of the Pala School, *pat* paintings of Bengal, ivories, terra-cottas and specimens of the doll-maker's art from all parts of India, and also textiles. Nandalal copied for Abanindranath a large number of old drawings. Also, Nandalal had become Art teacher to the children of the Tagore family. And, of course, being in daily contact with the Master, he was learning all the time.

That was the time when the vigour of the new art movement was already reflected in the growth of a recognizable school and a circle of painters, which, with Abanindranath as the central figure and acknowledged *guru*, included Nandalal, Asit Kumar Haldar, Surendranath Ganguli, Samarendranath Gupta, Kshitindranath Mazumder, Surendranath Kar, K. Venkatappa, Hakim Mahammad Khan, Sailendranath Dey and Durgesh Singha. Apart from Havell's, the support which the new school received from Gaganendra Nath Tagore, himself an outstanding artist with a distinctive style of his own, Ananda Coomaraswamy and O. C. Gangoly is especially mentionable. It should be noted that Abanindranath's studio at Jorasanko was not merely a painter's workshop. Those who gathered there did not limit their attention to the classical and the folk arts. There were readings and discussions to promote informed criticism, a new awareness of aesthetic values and an enlargement and heightening of feeling about beauty and art.

ANTELOPE : *Collection Indulekha Ghosh*

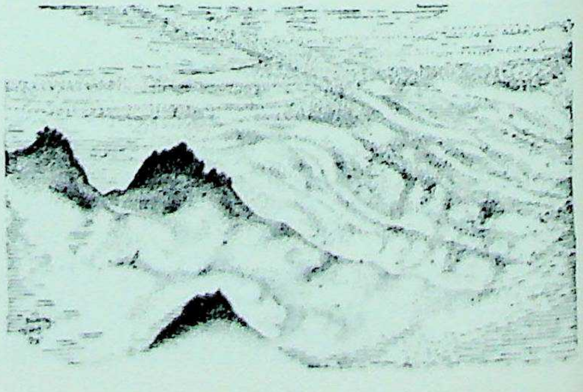


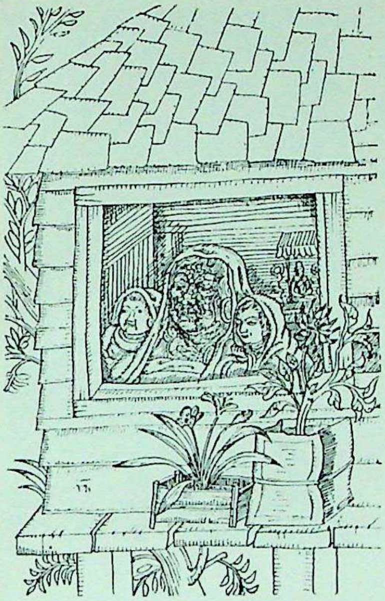
These latter objectives, however, needed a special forum or organization for their pursuit on a wider, national scale. And this was provided by the Indian Society of Oriental Art which had been formed in 1907. The principal initiative was Havell's, backed by Sir John Woodroffe, Sister Nivedita, Abanindranath, Gaganendranath and others. The object of the Society was stated to be the 'cultivation by its members, and the promotion amongst the public, of a knowledge of all branches of ancient and modern oriental art by means of the collection by its members of objects of such art and the exhibition of such collections to the Society ; the reading of papers, holding of discussions, the purchase of books and journals relating to art ; correspondence with kindred societies or collectors and connoisseurs ; the publication of a journal ; as also the furtherance of modern Indian art by means of holding public loan exhibitions of objects of ancient and modern and in particular oriental art owned by the members of the Society or others ; the encouragement and assistance of Indian artists, art students and workers in artistic industries by, among other means, help given to them by the Society towards the disposal of their work, the holding of public exhibitions of works of modern Indian art and the award of prizes and diplomas at such exhibitions.'

Nandalal became associated with the work of Indian Society of Oriental Art. His picture *Shiva-Sati* at one of the Society's exhibitions brought him a prize of Rs. 500. This provided the wherewithal for a tour in northern India in the company of a friend. With an eye for things of artistic interest wherever he went, Nandalal visited Gaya, Banaras, Agra, Delhi, Mathura and Vrindaban. Not long afterwards he carried out, with O. C. Gangoly, a tour of pilgrimage in Southern India also. Not only the architecture and sculptures of the temples were studied. The south Indian way of life also was observed with equal interest. These tours, in north, and south India, formed a special chapter in Nandalal's life.

The caves of Ajanta in Hyderabad first became known to the world in 1819. Descriptions of them appeared in the 'Transactions of the Royal Asiatic Society' in 1829. In 1844 the Society addressed the Directors of the East India Company with a plea for the preservation

HILL AND PLAIN : *Collection R. N. Chakravorty*





GRAND-MA : *Collection R. N. Chakravorty*

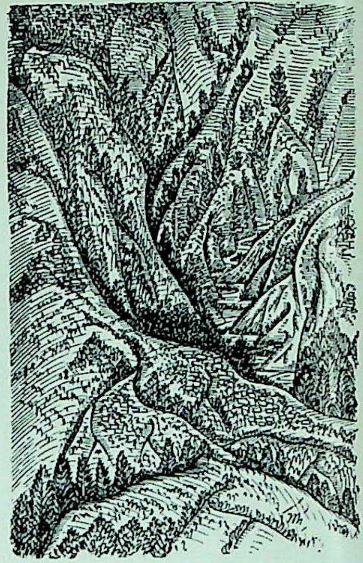
of the caves and the execution of copies of the frescoes and as a result of their minute, Major Gill of the Madras Army was engaged to make facsimile copies of 'all the pictures' and was allowed adequate assistance. Major Gill worked with devotion at Ajanta until the Mutiny and sent from time to time about thirty copies to London where they were kept in the Museum of the East India Company. Those were painted in oils and were, except for vehicle, facsimiles.

In 1875 the Government of India sanctioned an annual grant and Mr. John Griffiths with the help of students from Bombay School of Art began the work of copying the frescoes. The copies were sent to South Kensington Museum. But on June 12, 1885, out of 125 canvases which had been sent to South Kensington, 87 were destroyed or damaged by fire.

Nearly a quarter of a century later, at the instance of the India Society and of Lawrence Binyon of the British Museum, Lady Herringham, wife of Sir Wilmont Herringham, came out to India on a mission whose object was the execution of a new set of copies of the Ajanta frescoes. In this work Lady Herringham secured financial assistance from many Indian patrons of art including some Indian Princes. She had brought some artists from England but they were not enough to cope with the work. So she asked Sister Nivedita for some Indian artists. When Nandalal received Nivedita's message he was at first unwilling to go to Ajanta, as it was so far away. But Nivedita was determined to send some Indian artists, and especially Nandalal, on this job. She saw Abanindranath and explained to him the importance of the matter. But even Abanindranath's approval and encouragement could not completely overcome Nandalal's hesitancy. At last one day Nivedita appeared and declared with a note of finality that she had fixed up everything, nothing being left to Nandalal and the three others who were to accompany him, except to get ready and start. The party consisting of Nandalal, Asit Haldar, Venkatappa and Samarendranath Gupta left for Ajanta in December, 1910.

An idea of the nature of the job that awaited them at Ajanta can be had from the following description[*] by one of Lady Herringham's artists:

'It is nearly impossible to get at once an impress of the whole of the largest composition without the aid of artificial light. The acetylene lamp which we used gave a good general light over two-thirds of a wall and this was useful for completing copies. For tracing frescoes in dark parts, a strong motor lamp on a tall three-legged stand, and so arranged that the light could be turned on the top or bottom of a wall, would have been most satisfactory. Oil lamps are possible but they are difficult to manage and the light is not so concentrated. When the painting was very much darkened with age the best way of tracing accurately was to fasten the two top corners of the tracing paper with adhesive slips, roll it up quickly from the bottom with left hand, look at the outline, roll the paper back and trace. In this way it is easier to copy the various thicknesses of line ; and it is not necessary to draw lines freely on the paper. The outline everywhere is sensitive. When coloured copies were made, a fairly rough tracing was done first and transferred to the painting paper on the frames and the outline accurately copied from the fresco afterwards ; but in the case of those intended to remain as outlines, the exact tracing was made on the wall. The coloured copies were executed on thick cartridge paper.'



HIMALAYAN GORGE
Collection R. N. Chakravorty

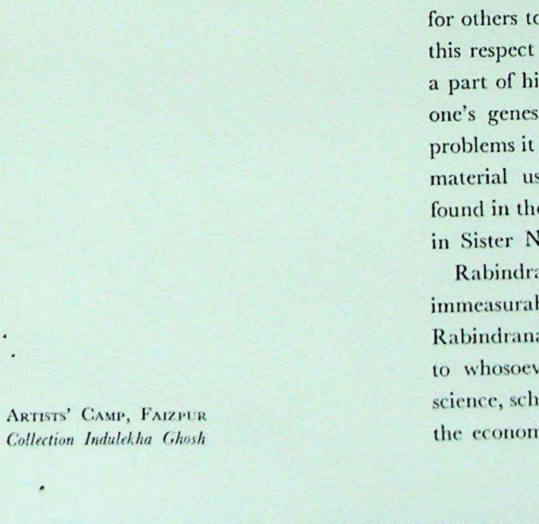
After completing their allotted tasks at Ajanta, Nandalal and his three colleagues returned to Calcutta in February, 1911. By this time Nandalal's fame as an artist had spread, not only in India. The works of Abanindranath, Nandalal and their colleagues belonging to what was now called the 'Bengal School' of painting with an established position in the country roused interest among art-lovers and connoisseurs in some foreign countries also.

About 1913 Nandalal had an argument with Abanindranath. The discussion has not been published but it is known that the point at issue was whether art was for the people or for the élite alone. Nandalal now came to live in the family house at Banipur. He felt an urge for *pat*-painting. Following the 'Kalighat' and other models, he went on painting picture after picture while he conceived an extraordinary scheme to dispose of the products of his brush for the benefit of jute mill workers and other common folk. The idea was to offer pictures at such a low price that poor people could buy them. So the *pat*-pictures were priced at four annas each and Nandalal made an arrangement with a grocer's shop for displaying and selling them. For the shop, the pictures had an advertisement value because they attracted people. So the artist was not charged any commission. Every evening Nandalal would call at the shop to collect the day's sale-proceeds from his pictures. This scheme came to an abrupt end when Abanindranath, on coming to know of it, sent for Nandalal and bought up his entire stock of *pat*-pictures.

During this period of his stay at Banipur Nandalal had constant engagements in Calcutta where he came almost daily. For instance, the frescoes in the *Basu Vijnan Mandir* (Sir Jagadish Bose's Institute) were executed while he was staying at Banipur. Nandalal assisted also in the activities of the Indian Society of Oriental Art in various ways.

The then Governor of Bengal, Lord Carmichael, was a lover of art and he took great interest in the Society. He was eager to have some works of the Bengal School of painting exhibited in Europe. This was just before the outbreak of the first World War. A collection of pictures was made through the Society and these, together with other objects of art assembled from various parts of India, were despatched by ship for London. But war had already broken out and the ship was torpedoed in the Mediterranean and lost with all it contained. Among the pictures so lost were several by Nandalal including *Sati's Tapasya* and *Poush-Parvan*. The tragedy was deeply felt by Nandalal. It is difficult for others to gauge the depth of an artist's feeling for his creations. In this respect Nandalal is especially sensitive. His pictures are so much a part of his self that his mind seems to carry a vivid imprint of each one's genesis—the background of its inspiration, what problem or problems it set and how he solved them, anything of interest about the material used, and so on. Reproductions of *Poush-Parvan* can be found in the Calcutta periodical 'Prabashi.' *Sati's Tapasya* was printed in Sister Nivedita's posthumous book.

Rabindranath Tagore's contribution to the renaissance in India is immeasurable. Apart from his own superb direct contribution, Rabindranath was a source of inspiration, encouragement and help to whosoever or whatever showed any promise in literature, art, science, scholarship or in fact in any field of creative activity, including the economic. He radiated faith in a resurgent India and wherever

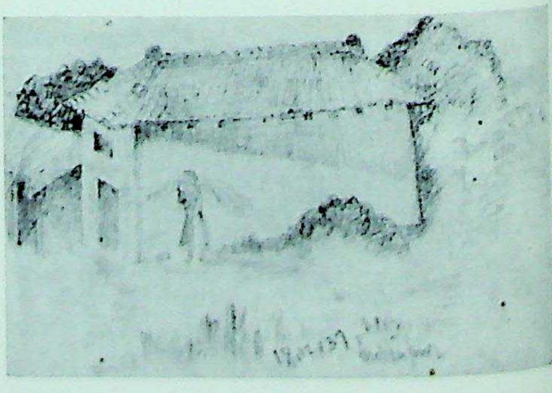


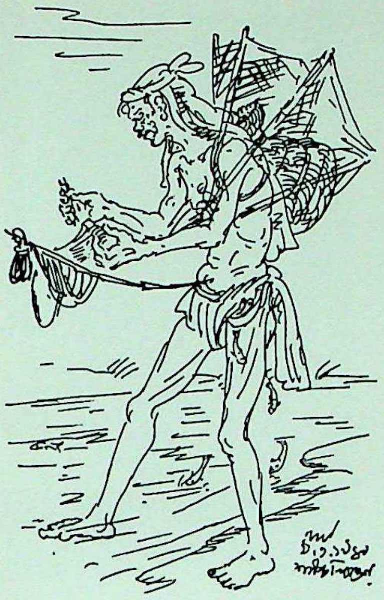
ARTISTS' CAMP, FAIZPUR
Collection Indulekha Ghosh

he saw any talent or genius struggling for self-expression he would go to the limit of his power and resources to help it. The 'Bengal School' of painting owes an immense debt to Rabindranath. If its *guru* or creator was Abanindranath, the latter himself was in a sense created by Rabindranath. The Poet took a deep interest in the members of Abanindranath's circle of disciples and colleagues. Among them, he had already recruited Asit Haldar as an art teacher for his school at Santiniketan which was the nucleus of the present Visva-Bharati. Later, Surendranath Kar also joined Santiniketan. Mukul Dey, another prominent member of Abanindranath's 'family' of artists, was a former student of the school at Santiniketan. It was Rabindranath's great hope that Nandalal, too, would join Santiniketan. But at that time the resources of the Brahmacharya Vidyalaya were limited and it was some years before Nandalal came to join the institution at Santiniketan permanently. His first visit to Santiniketan took place in the summer of 1915 on an invitation from the Poet. Rabindranath made an occasion of it by giving a reception to Nandalal in the traditional Santiniketan style at the *Amra-Kunja*. The Poet read a poem specially addressed to Nandalal. The other artists present—Asit Haldar, Suren Kar and Mukul Dey—also shared in the ceremonial honours.

An incident associated with this occasion may be mentioned here to give a glimpse of the playful side of Nandalal's character. It had been arranged among Mukul Dey, Surendranath Kar and Nandalal that they would assemble at a particular spot at the Howrah station from where they were to take train for Bolpur. When Mukul Dey arrived Nandalal and Suren Kar were already waiting for him at the appointed place under a gas light. When they met, Nandalal said to Mukul, 'We arrived a few minutes ago. Now, here is something for you. Okakura gave me this stick of Japanese ink. I give it to you.' Nandalal handed the present to Mukul who was very glad to keep it. At Santiniketan, Rabindranath told Mukul that he wanted some good paper on which to write a poem on the occasion of the reception and present to Nandalal. Mukul had in his stock some good 10″ × 12″ Chinese handmade paper ornamented with cherry blossoms with light gold edge. He took it to the Poet who asked now for some good

WAYSIDE COTTAGE: *Collection Indulekha Ghosh*





Fisherman : *Collection Jamuna Sen*

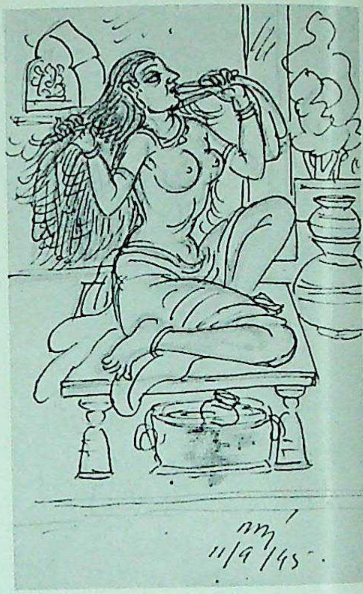
ink. That was easy to produce. Mukul brought forth the stick of 'Japanese ink' which he had received from Nandalal at Howrah station. It was not possible to dissolve the stick and put it in an inkpot. So Mukul put a new nib on a new penholder and gave it to Rabindranath to write while he himself stood by to supply ink on to the nib from the stick with a wet brush. As the writing proceeded the Poet went on wondering why the ink was so dull. Mukul assured him there was no cause for worry—the ink would brighten up afterwards. After the ceremony, the artists returned to the cottage where they had put up. By that time daylight had dimmed and when they tried to read the poem, Tagore's writing appeared faint and hardly legible. A kerosene lantern was brought in but its light made no improvement. Then Nandalal asked Mukul Dey, 'Do you know what paint was used to write the poem ?' Mukul Dey said, 'Why, it was that Japanese ink given by Okakura.' Nandalal gave out a cry.' What have you done, Mukul ! It was a joke. Okakura has indeed given me a very valuable stick of Japanese ink. But what I gave you at Howrah was neither that nor any other Japanese ink. It was a carbon stick that had fallen from one of the gas lamps at the station.'

The joke played on Mukul Dey contained the suggestion of a fling at the craze, then prevalent among many of Nandalal's artist friends, for everything Japanese. It was enough to say that it was 'Japanese ink' to make Mukul Dey fall for a stick of carbon.

Of course, a few days later Nandalal received from Rabindranath another copy of the poem in the Poet's handwriting—this time no doubt in ink of a more orthodox kind.

During the cold weather of 1915 Nandalal, along with Mukul Dey and Suren Kar, spent over a month as the Poet's guest at and near Silaidah in the Tagores' estate in North Bengal. Most of the time they lived in house-boats on the river Padma or in tents on *chars*. The whole day passed in painting and sketching. The glittering river with its wide expanse, the *chars* extending to the horizon, hundreds of thousands of wild ducks from the Himalayan regions come to plains in the winter, the human scenes of village life on the river side—provided no end of subjects for the artist's brush and pencil. When the visit concluded, Nandalal and his colleagues had, after exhausting their own stock of paper, finished even Rabindranath's own pad of note paper. The same year (1915) Rabindranath organised a home school, named Vichitra, for the Tagore children at Jorasanko where Nandalal became art teacher.

In 1917 Nandalal had a serious illness which confined him to bed for a pretty long time. To complete his recovery and for a change of air he went to Puri with his wife and children. Surendranath Kar and the Japanese artist Kampo Arai San also were with him. When Nandalal had sufficiently regained his strength, a visit to Konarak was planned. At that time the route from Puri to Konarak was a much longer one than now and the only possible conveyance was, of course, a bullock cart. Even without a halt, the journey would take no less than two days. A convoy of bullock carts took Nandalal with his family and the other two artists to Konarak where they stayed for three days.



Bath: *Collection Indulekha Ghosh*

VISVA-BHARATI was founded in December, 1918 but it took a few months to get properly started. At Jorasanko, one afternoon in July, 1919, when Nandalal was absorbed in work at a picture in the Vichitra school, he felt the light touch of a hand on his back. Startled, he turned round to see Rabindranath. In a voice full of affectionate entreaty, the Poet said, 'Nanda, you, too, must come to our Santiniketan.' The request was to take charge of the Art department—Kala-Bhavana—of Visva-Bharati. Nandalal could not say 'No' to this request and he joined Visva-Bharati in September, 1919 but, as we shall see presently, there were still some interruptions to be gone through before he finally settled at Santiniketan.

Kala-Bhavana had only three or four students to start with, but under the care of Nandalal it became one of the liveliest and most attractive departments of Visva-Bharati in no time. Then—only a few months after he had joined it—Nandalal received a letter from Abanindranath—a call back to Calcutta. The letter spoke of a scheme of expansion of the activities of the Indian Society of Oriental Art, for which new premises had already been rented. The Society's work was no longer to be confined to discussions and exhibitions but was to include art teaching as well. Nandalal was to

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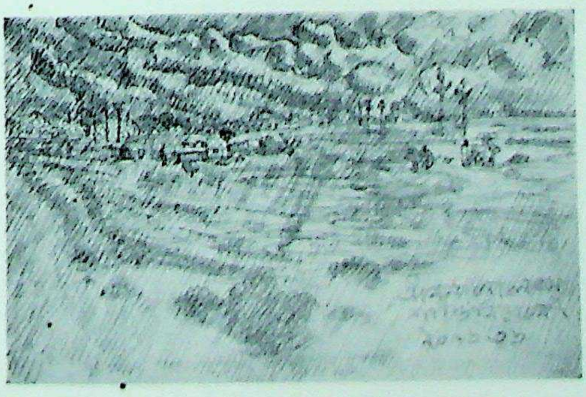
shoulder the major responsibility, he must come to Calcutta at once. Coming from Abanindranath, it was for Nandalal a summons from the *Guru*. Yet he was unwilling to leave Santiniketan and wrote so to Abanindranath. Abanindranath replied that the Society's scheme would have to be dropped if Nandalal did not come. Rabindranath was not at Santiniketan when he heard about all this. He lost no time in writing to Nandalal, 'If you leave Santiniketan, Kala-Bhavana will close down.' Eventually, Nandalal had to yield to Abanindranath, and he returned, unwillingly, to Calcutta after he had been with Visva-Bharati only for some months. The wrench was painful on both sides but it did not remain unrepaired for long. In fact, even when Nandalal worked for the Society in Calcutta he continued to be in close touch with Santiniketan. He spent every week-end there. This routine continued for more than a year when a complaint reached the authorities of the Society about Nandalal's weekly visits to Santiniketan because he could not always return to Calcutta by Monday. Lest any bitterness should arise out of it, Nandalal resigned from the Society's work as soon as he heard of this complaint. He now came to stay permanently at Santiniketan, but some time passed before he rejoined Visva-Bharati wholly, in a stipendiary capacity.

This was the time of Gandhiji's first Non-co-operation movement and the whole country was in a state of agitation which to some extent affected Nandalal's mind also. At this juncture an interlude of three strenuous months at the Bagh Caves provided a sort of emotional restorative. As Nandalal himself recalls:

'It was 1921. We were trying to settle down to our work at Santiniketan but my mind was rather distracted owing to the political upheaval in the country. There came one day about this time a wholly unexpected invitation from the Gwalior Darbar to go and undertake the copying work of the frescoes in the Bagh Caves which were fast crumbling down. The offer opened up a possible avenue of much-needed change in environment and occupation. Situated in the southern slopes of the Vindhya range on the left bank of the river Wagh or Bagh, a small tributary of the Narmada, the Caves extend over a frontage of nearly 750 yards.

'On detraining at Mhow we (Nandalal, Asit Haldar and Suren Kar)

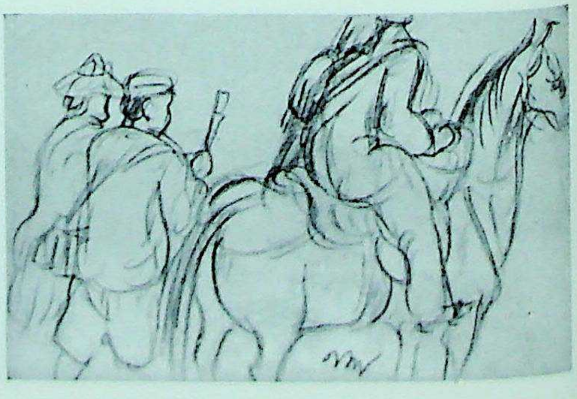
MONSOON TIME AT SANTINIKETAN
Collection Indulekha Ghosh

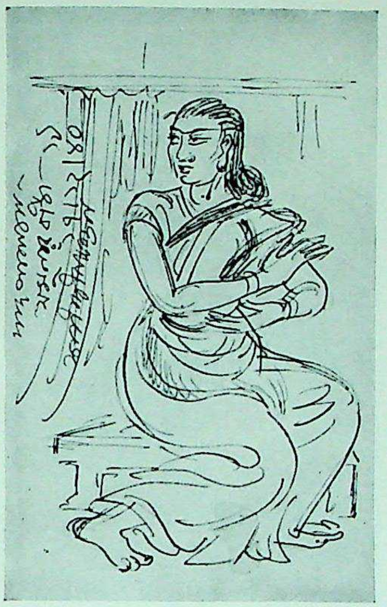


were met by an officer of the Gwalior State who put us in a motor bus which stopped at dusk at Dhar, a small *taluka* outpost in Gwalior. After nearly a week's preparation there the three artists set out one morning for Bagh. Four bullock-carts were waiting outside the Dhar dak-bungalow. The road from Dhar to Bagh traversed through dense forests at several points and depredations on highways by panthers and tigers were not absolutely unknown. We were, however, well protected by military guards. On the fourth evening in a most romantic early winter twilight we reached Bagh *bustee*, a mere collection of about a dozen Bhil huts with a cluster of densely wooded hills on all sides, one of which contained the famous Caves with frescoes.

'The next morning as soon as we had a hurried breakfast we ran to the Caves for we were impatient with excitement. But a rude shock was in store for us. The Caves, though discovered about five decades ago, had been allowed to run to almost complete decay. The roof over the entrance on whose walls were all the frescoes, had collapsed, leaving the pictures exposed to the ruinous effects of the sun and rain. We saw before us nothing but a dark patch over the walls, roughly 50 feet by 20 feet with traces of faint lines and colour here and there. We would not have believed at all but for the insistence of the State archaeologist that we were actually standing in front of the frescoes which we were commissioned to trace and copy. We stood there dumbfounded and completely perplexed when we were informed that the pictures would become visible if water were thrown upon the walls, as indeed was the case. On liberal application of water soused over the walls, the pictures considerably lighted up no doubt but we could not carry on long with this method, as the earthen plastering of the walls would come crumbling down along with water. Such vandalism was certainly not for an artist. We eventually planned a modified method ; instead of roughly throwing water over the walls, we would apply a soaked sponge gently over a small portion of the picture and as the lines showed themselves we would carry on with a little tracing. This, however, was a most laborious and monotonous method with the additional difficulty that even after a few days' work we were unable to understand what actually were the pictures in their entirety as we could see only a very small portion at any one time. We had yet to

TRAVELLERS : *Collection Jamuna Sen*





Artist's Daughter : *Collection Jamuna Sen*

solve the main problem—a proper method of tracing the pictures. The task was exceedingly difficult as even after the application of water, the lines would not be so very clear as to show appreciably through the tracing paper. I was, however, lucky to remember that a Japanese artist friend of mine, Kampo Arai San, had a method of his own to deal with such difficult cases—he would place the tracing paper over the picture, lift the paper round a corner a little, scrutinize the lines closely and then immediately replace the paper and hurriedly do a little tracing. That was the only possible method and after three or four days' constant practice, we became quite quick with the work. But this was nevertheless a very dull process and robbed us of most of the artistic joy of our work. For three long months we plodded on like that, every day for close upon eight or nine hours and brought our task to a satisfactory finish.'

Visitors to Kala-Bhavana will see an interesting map kept there. From it an idea can be had of the far-flung influence of the Santiniketan school of art. A dot is put on this map for every student who has received training at Kala-Bhavana, indicating the place from where he or she came. The whole of India is now full of such dots. There are a few which mark places outside India also.

About the method of teaching followed at Kala-Bhavana Nandalal once said :

'Here in Kala-Bhavana, the students are encouraged to try their hands at original work right away from the very beginning ; and gradually, according to individual needs, they are taken through all the different branches of technique till they finish their course, the whole process taking full five years.

'Technique, for our purpose, is divided into six main categories. All these are of equal value ; individual need determines the particular branch to be taken up first.

'The six main branches may be enumerated thus :

1. The correct reproduction of a picture or an object as seen by the eye.
2. The study of an object from all possible viewpoints and in such

a manner that it can be reproduced from memory when such object is not within sight.

It must be mentioned here that a one-without-a-second view-point in the study of an object has no place in our system. These studies are intended to drive the object deep into the sub-conscious mind from where they are expected to emerge, the basic rhythm and correct proportions of the object standing clear on the conscious mind of the learner.

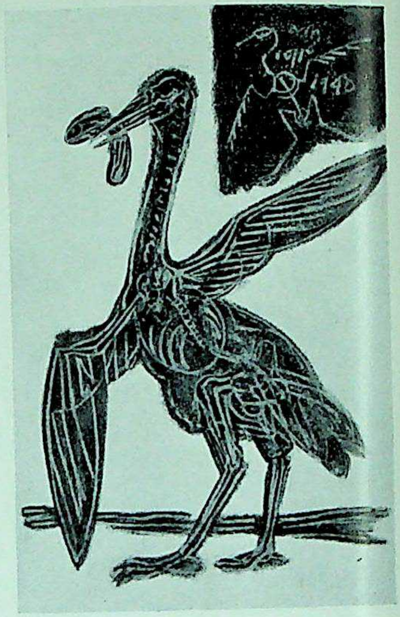
3. The above studies are followed up, in natural sequence, by an attempt at concretising the abstract form behind the object.
4. The study of light and shade and of perspective in order to represent a solid mass in its proper dimensions.
5. The study of the anatomy of the human body.
6. The study of colour: Its right use and the harmonious blending of its various tones and depths in order to create the desired effect.

'This last is a special study by itself. The student is encouraged to make a close study of nature and of good pictures so that he may develop within himself a deep sense of colour harmony.

'The above as a course of study in the principles and practice of technique, it will be observed, closely resembles the formulae as laid down in our ancient art treatises. They are, (1) Discrimination (as between forms, etc.) ; (2) Comparison (in similarity or otherwise) ; (3) Proportion ; (4) Expression of emotions ; (5) Grace and beauty (in treatment) ; and (6) Finishing (which in its comprehensiveness includes colour composition, harmony in form and in expression, etc.)

'Our own experience has been that careful discrimination has to be made between student and student according to their respective needs and capacities in the matter of timing the study of the different branches of technique. The natural tendency and the individual bent as revealed in their original work must suggest the order. Technique is not recognised as a study by itself nor are lessons as such given in it. The aim always kept in view is that technique must help forward the original work of the student. And as individual needs differ, the order of study differs accordingly.

'In our view, a real work of art must show the artist's personality, must be natural and must conform to tradition as well. The artist



Class-room Sketch
Collection Indulekha Ghosh

cannot afford to ignore any of these essentials nor can he concentrate on one at the expense of the other two. They must be well balanced. Too much emphasis on personality may lead to eccentricity ; on naturalness, to mere imitation ; on tradition, to inelasticity. The students here are taught to avoid these pitfalls.

'What is understood by composition in the academic sense has no place in the system followed in Kala-Bhavana. We prefer the term creation instead. By composition is meant the bringing together of certain unrelated parts and then shape them into a rhythmic whole, the life movement coming last. It is like creating the body first and putting the breath of life into it afterwards. To the Indian artist the life movement suggests itself along with the Idea. Then comes rhythm closely followed by form. In other words, the life-urge creates the form best suited for the expression of the Idea.

'To our mind, art is a complete whole and it is to be judged as such. A mere analysis of its component parts is of no help. Art is a live something and it is so intermingled with the artist's personality that it is well-nigh impossible to separate the two. To understand the artist, one has to study the entire background of his life, his day-to-day inspirations and his way of opening himself up to them, his individuality and the measure of its power. All these the *guru* must do in respect of his pupil-artists and that with a deep and subtle sympathy in order to be able to guide them and help them to realise their own power. This is our way in Kala-Bhavana.

'Gurudeva had recognised that an artistic atmosphere was essential in creating artists. And it was in order to start such an atmosphere that he summoned us to the Santiniketan Asram. Here in Kala-Bhavana it is recognised that to keep up such an atmosphere, the teachers must continue producing original works of art which will inspire the pupils to similar efforts. This is considered to be an essential part of teaching and, without it, teaching would be a mechanical process devoid of inspiration and utterly useless. Those who will come after us must of necessity conform to this view. They must keep a watchful eye on the atmosphere built up with so much thought and care and see that it does not deteriorate and all our sacrifices go in vain. It is not so much by their skill in teaching that they will be

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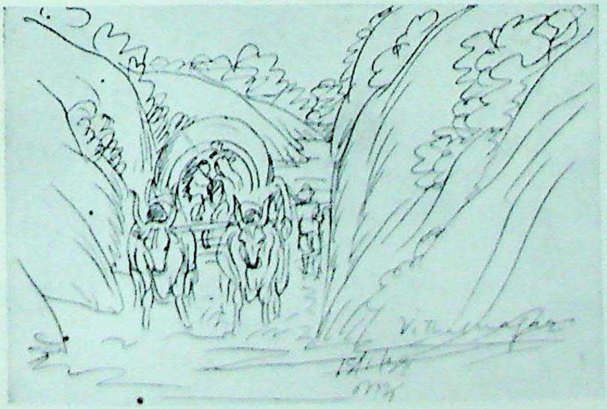
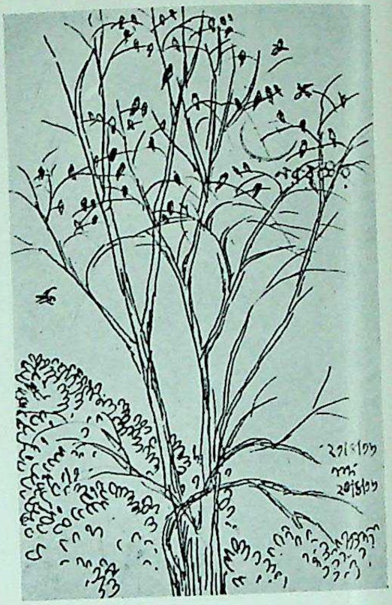


judged but by the spirit with which they are actuated as artists and by their devotion to the sacred cause. That is the only way to keep up the ideals of Kala-Bhavana of Abanindranath and of Gurudeva.'

Nandalal on another occasion said: 'For an Oriental artist it is not necessary to start with a strenuous effort to master anatomy as an isolated subject, because in Oriental art an understanding of life-rhythm is enough to start work with and to give expression to ideas. With the progress of the artist's observation his knowledge of form increases and can be utilized in conception. But such knowledge should be utilized only to the extent necessary. One must guard against an excessive use of detail in form to the detriment of life-rhythm. The movement of the idea and the rhythm in its expression derive from life-rhythm. Perception of life-rhythm is instinctive in man. This can be seen even in pictures by children because it is this with which children start their work. Other examples are dolls made by the village potter, and the *pats*. The works of children and rural craftsmen, in general, all primitive art, become natural because they have little knowledge of form. The works of a high class artist are also natural because he is a master of that knowledge but eschews unnecessary complexity of detail in the expression of the idea and rhythm.



EVENING: *Collection Indulekha Ghosh*

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'When it does not fit in with the picture, one would be well advised to suppress one's knowledge of anatomy. In my picture *Shiva-Sati*, with the dead body of Sati lying in Shiva's lap, his left knee should not be visible according to correct anatomy. But the picture demanded it and had it. The situation can be likened to the predicament of a couple fallen in the hands of robbers in a forest. If the husband loves his wife, he tries to save her first and not the ornaments she may be wearing. Similarly, the real artist, if necessary, will not hesitate to throw his knowledge of anatomy to the winds in order to save the picture.

* * * * * *

'Art depends, simultaneously, on three things—tradition, nature and originality. An work of art which excludes any one of these cannot be whole or perfect. Art which relies on nature and originality only but has no link with tradition and no strong roots in the past tends to remain in a sort of perpetually infantile stage subject to wild eccentricities of the artist. On the other hand, tradition and originality, without nature, make art lifeless while in the absence of originality it becomes stereotyped.

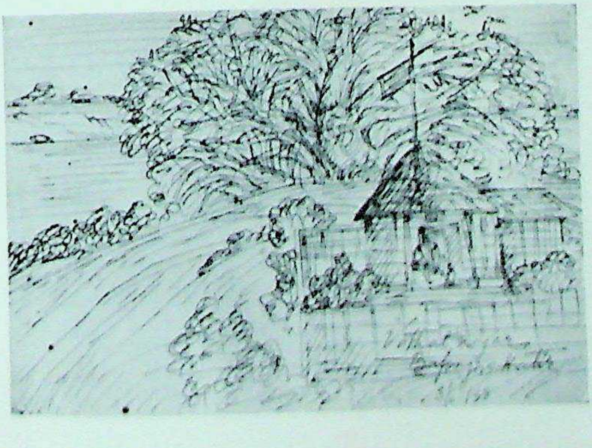
* * * * * *

'Pictures, again, can be put into three classes—realistic, decorative and traditional. In a realistic picture reality is followed as far as this is possible without any detriment to the integrity of the picture. In decorative work such combinations are permissible as a horse joined to a lotus stem, a bird to a fish or a human face to a duck's body. Traditional art abounds with examples of the combination of the first two styles, that is, realistic and decorative. One, however, has to be very careful in the use of such combination and guard against recklessness that can easily become disastrous from the point of view of art. For instance, I felt a shock when I saw a gramophone in the border of a Banarasi saree instead of the traditional conch, or creeper or flower. The designer must have thought that he was scoring on the "old men" ; but in fact, he had marred and not made art.

* * * * * *

'When painting, the artist must constantly keep in mind the main note of the picture, what one wants to see and say through it. Some particular detail may be good and beautiful by itself and yet out of place in the picture in which case it will have to be discarded. There must be control so that neither line nor colour becomes loud. There is no rule that one must always follow the exact juxtaposition of colours in nature. What is essential is to observe their basic inter-relations and congruity to environment. As one can start a song on any note so a man can be painted in red or even in green. The important thing is to know what colour to put next to it to make it come off best. In decorative art, it would be permissible to paint the sky or a cloud or a hill in green like that of the young paddy. The artist has to learn from nature the deeper and finer relationships between colour and colour.'

BAPUJI'S COTTAGE, VITHALNAGAR
Collection Indulekha Ghosh



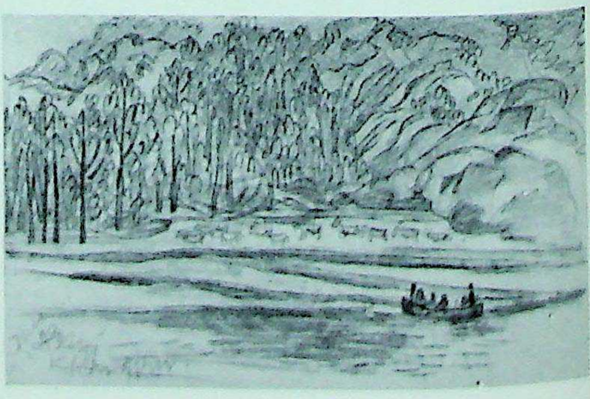
Nandalal has always stressed the importance of developing personal relations between teacher and student. It was for this reason that he would not take in too many students. Every year there were more applicants than could be admitted. When working at a picture it was Nandalal's practice every day to have, by turns, two students near him as helpers. He would talk to them, not necessarily about art or the picture in hand all the time. They would converse on all manner of subjects, including personal matters and the students' home life. In this way the teacher brought the students close to him. Apart from this, there were picnics and the regular annual outings of two or three weeks each in which all the students and teachers of Kala-Bhavana led by Nandalal joined.

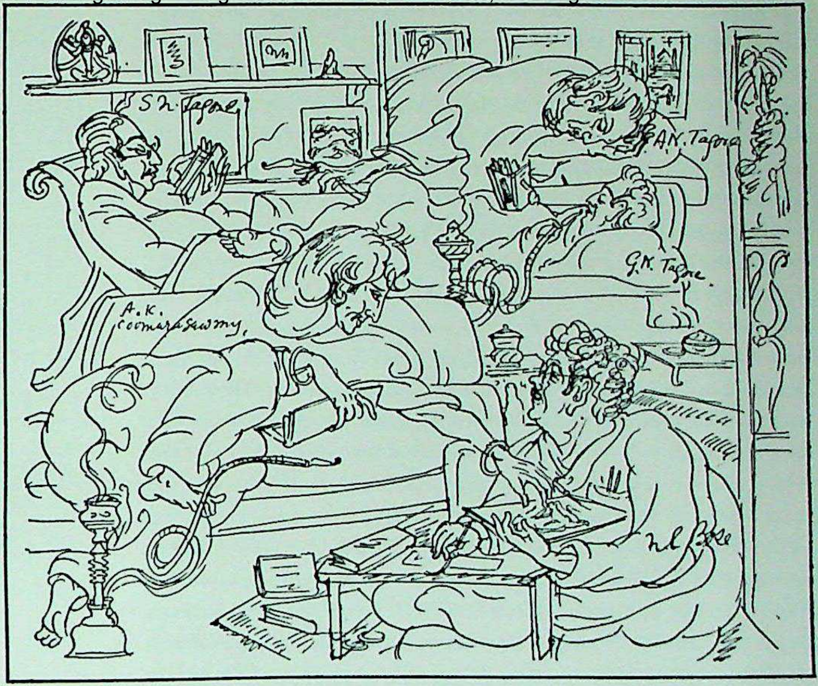
Relationship between teachers and students was also strengthened by joint creative work which has been an outstanding feature of the life and teaching at Kala-Bhavana. Evidence of this will be found in the frescoes and other works in the various buildings at Santiniketan. When Nandalal was invited by the Government of Baroda to execute frescoes in the Royal Mausoleum there in 1943 he took along with him a batch of students who shared in the work.

While on the subject of frescoes, we may recall two disappointments which were deeply felt by Nandalal. He was very eager for the work in the Mulagandhakuti Vihara at Sarnath, but according to the terms of the endowment it could be given only to an artist who was also a practising Buddhist. Nandalal was also very eager to execute frescoes in the Ramakrishna temple at Belur, but later he had to give up this dearly cherished hope on account of failing health. A large number of sketches were done both for Mulagandhakuti Vihara and Ramakrishna Temple.

Orders from outside for fresco-painting, poster-drawing, book-illustrating, etc. were executed through the *Karu-Sangha*, an organization which Nandalal established in 1929 for the benefit of the members of Kala-Bhavana, especially students. For, Nandalal had found that there were many among the latter who were far from well off. It would be a great help to them if they could earn some money as they went through their course. Also, all did not get regular employment imme-

THE LAKE NOT FAR FROM KHARAGPUR
Collection Indulekha Ghosh





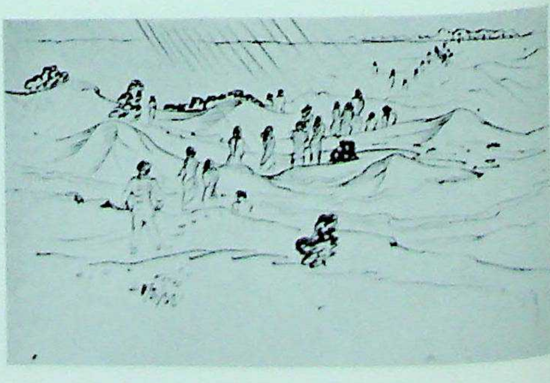
ABANINDRANATH'S STUDIO

diately on their passing out. The *Karu-Sangha* helped many such artists through difficult times.

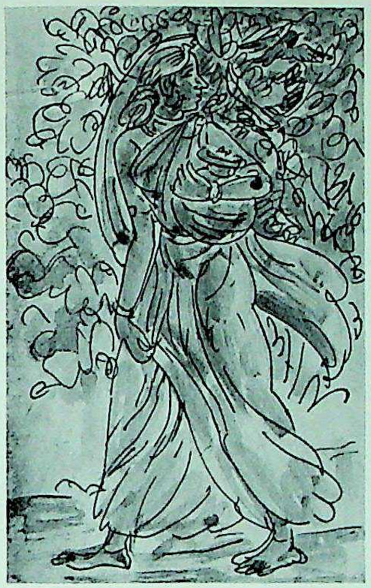
In 1924, Nandalal accompanied Rabindranath on a four months' tour of China, Japan, Malaya, and Burma. The party included also a number of Indian scholars. The object of the tour was to revive and foster closer cultural contacts and exchange of ideas between those countries and India. The tour provided Nandalal with an opportunity, which he fully utilised, of making first-hand acquaintance with the arts and the artists of the countries visited. Ten years later, when Rabindranath visited Ceylon, Nandalal was with him.

Though he had been known to Gandhiji before, Nandalal came into close touch with the Mahatma first in 1935, about the time of the Lucknow session of the Indian National Congress. Gandhiji, who gave a top place to art in the life of the nation, had summoned Nandalal to Lucknow to decorate the pandal in which the Congress was to be held. Nandalal took with him a batch of students from Santiniketan to help him in the task. Nandalal beautified the Congress pandal in a way never done before. He had set a new style of pandal decoration. Next year the Congress was held at Faizpur, a village in Maharashtra. Again the summons came, but Gandhiji himself was not sure whether Nandalal could stay away from his work at Santiniketan for more than a month required by the job at Faizpur. But to Gandhiji's joy, Nandalal went to Faizpur and, as usual, with his batch of students. There he did not take up residence in the 'leaders' camp' as he was expected to do but stayed with his students among the volunteers. What he made with bamboo and straw as his main materials was wonderful.

The following year's Congress session was to be held at Haripura, a village in Gujerat. Well ahead of the date an invitation came to Nandalal to go to Bardoli to meet Gandhiji for preliminary discussions about the planning of the pandal. The reply went in a telegram from Nandalal begging to be excused this time because he was ill. But in less than a week and without any previous intimation Nandalal was at Bardoli, to Gandhiji's joyful surprise. Nandalal explained, 'I didn't expect to get well so soon. The day I felt well I started for Bardoli.' After a few days at Bardoli, Nandalal went to Haripura for having a close look at the peasantry's life in the locality. For he wanted that the art which was to be displayed in the making and decoration of the Congress pandal should be in tune with the life around. Returning to Bardoli, Nandalal told Gandhiji, 'I have now a clear idea of my task and am ready to start work.' 'No,' said Gandhiji, 'I see you are not quite well yet. You must rest yourself for a few days first. Why not come with me to Tithal ?' So Nandalal went to Tithal with Gandhiji for rest. Here is the account of a small but revealing incident about which Nandalal wrote in a letter from Tithal : 'One day coming to the sea-side for a walk, I left my shoes on the sand and strolled away



Kala-Bhavana Picnickers Return
Collection Indulekha Ghosh



Krishna Kaho : *Collection Indulekha Ghosh*

barefoot. As I came back after some time I found Gandhiji standing with his staff, keeping guard over my shoes.' 'Here are your shoes,' he said. What a watchful eye Gandhiji keeps even on the smallest things! He was keeping guard over my shoes lest there should be any difficulty for me in finding them. I got the shoes all right but felt terribly abashed. After that I gave up wearing shoes for many days.'

The days at Tithal, without any work, soon became somewhat dull for Nandalal. When Gandhiji saw this he told Nandalal, 'You cannot paint because you have not brought any paints with you. Why not try with earth ?' That was a good idea. Nandalal collected earths of different colours and made a series of pictures on post cards in poster style, depicting rural life.

Recollections of Haripura include the story of a dispute which was finally settled by Gandhiji himself. On the top of the flag-staff Nandalal had placed a flower made of cloth. To this the politicians objected. They said the flag must have the highest place, nothing could be above it. Nandalal said he had given the highest place to art, the flower must not be pulled down. Why didn't they object to the pulley at the mast-head ? The engineer in charge was called in but he was unable to settle the dispute. At last Gandhiji himself had to intercede. His verdict was that what Nandalal had said must prevail.

The pictures which formed a part of the decoration of the Congress pandal became famous as the *Haripura Posters*.

In matters relating to Art, Gandhiji's faith in Nandalal was unbounded. There was a proposal, which eventually did not materialize, to hold a Congress session at Puri in Orissa. In this connexion, a section of Congress leaders allowed their minds to be exercised over the nudes in the sculptures of the Puri and Konarak temples. An industrialist offered to have the offending sculptures plastered over at his cost. He actually got Gandhiji's consent for his proposal. When Gandhiji asked for Nandalal's opinion, Nandalal made a vigorous protest. 'The proposal,' he said, 'is an impossible one. The question here is one of viewpoint. To obliterate these figures will be to destroy some of the best creations of art. It is indisputable that the figures, as creations of art, belong to a high order.' Gandhiji accepted Nandalal's opinion and the proposal was buried.

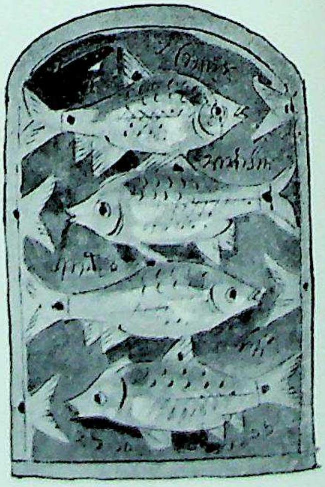
Gandhiji regarded Nandalal's work at Santiniketan as being of the highest value to the nation. Pre-eminent among the reasons that lay behind Gandhiji's anxiety for the future of Visva-Bharati and his efforts to help it, especially after the death of Tagore, was his conviction about this value.

There are examples in history of poets, painters and musicians being patronised and rewarded with titles or money-gifts by persons in authority, but the quality of the love and respect which India's supreme national leader felt for India's greatest modern artist was unique. For graciousness and spiritual purity, the Gandhi-Nandalal relationship was without a parallel.

Among the few things that adorned the bare walls of Gandhiji's hut at Sevagram was Nandalal's love-gift of a picture depicting the Buddha with a wounded lamb in His arms proceeding to the place of King Bimbisara's *yajna*.

FOR some time past Nandalal's health has not been too good. Yet, despite his years and a weakened body, much of the old routine of a disciplined, hard worker is intact. Nandalal rises at 3 A.M. and, after ablutions, reads the Gita, Rabindranath, Ramakrishna, Aurobindo and such like, till dawn and then goes out for a walk. During the walk he would pick up little things of beauty—maybe a flower, or a pebble or a piece of wood. Most of these daily acquisitions find their first resting place in a bag which Nandalal has named *Lakh takar jhuli* or the Lakh-rupee bag. Returning from the walk he starts work and paints through the morning. His advice to his pupils used to be: 'Morning time and morning light are the best for original work. Do your copying in the afternoons.'

Nandalal has been a whole-hearted participant in the cultural life of Santiniketan. There has never been a more regular attendant at the evening functions, whether musical, dramatic or literary. But anyone looking for him anywhere near the frontline of the audience would be doomed to disappointment. Invariably Nandalal would take a back seat, usually in the very last row. Many a time the Poet had tried to make Nandalal sit near him but never succeeded against the artist's adamantine shyness.



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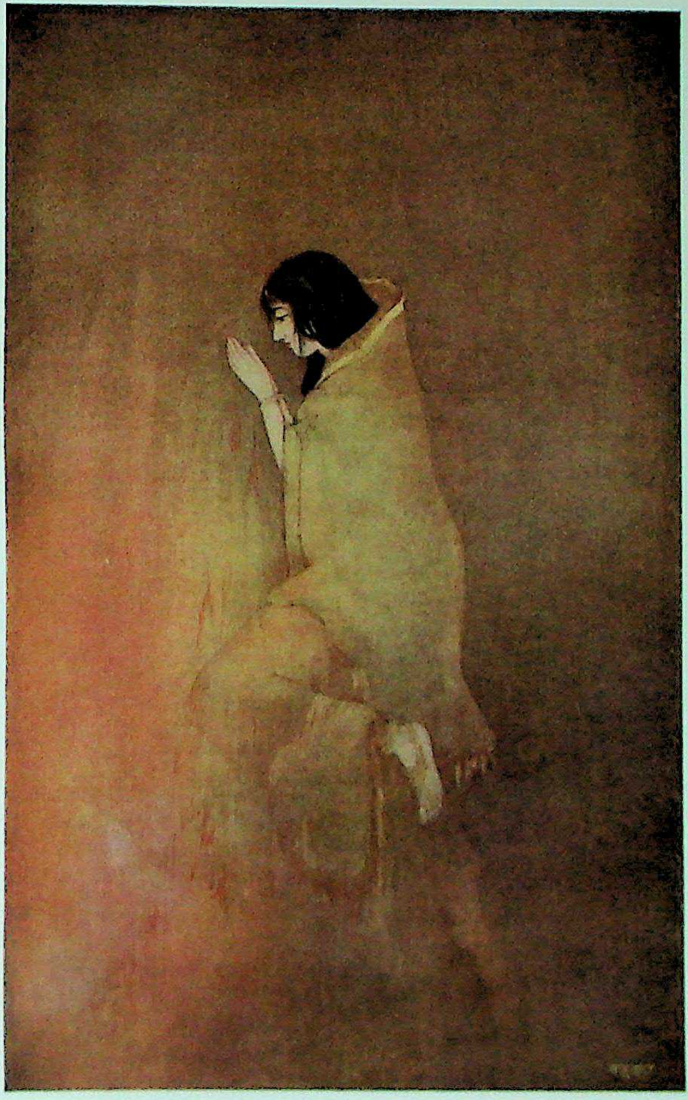
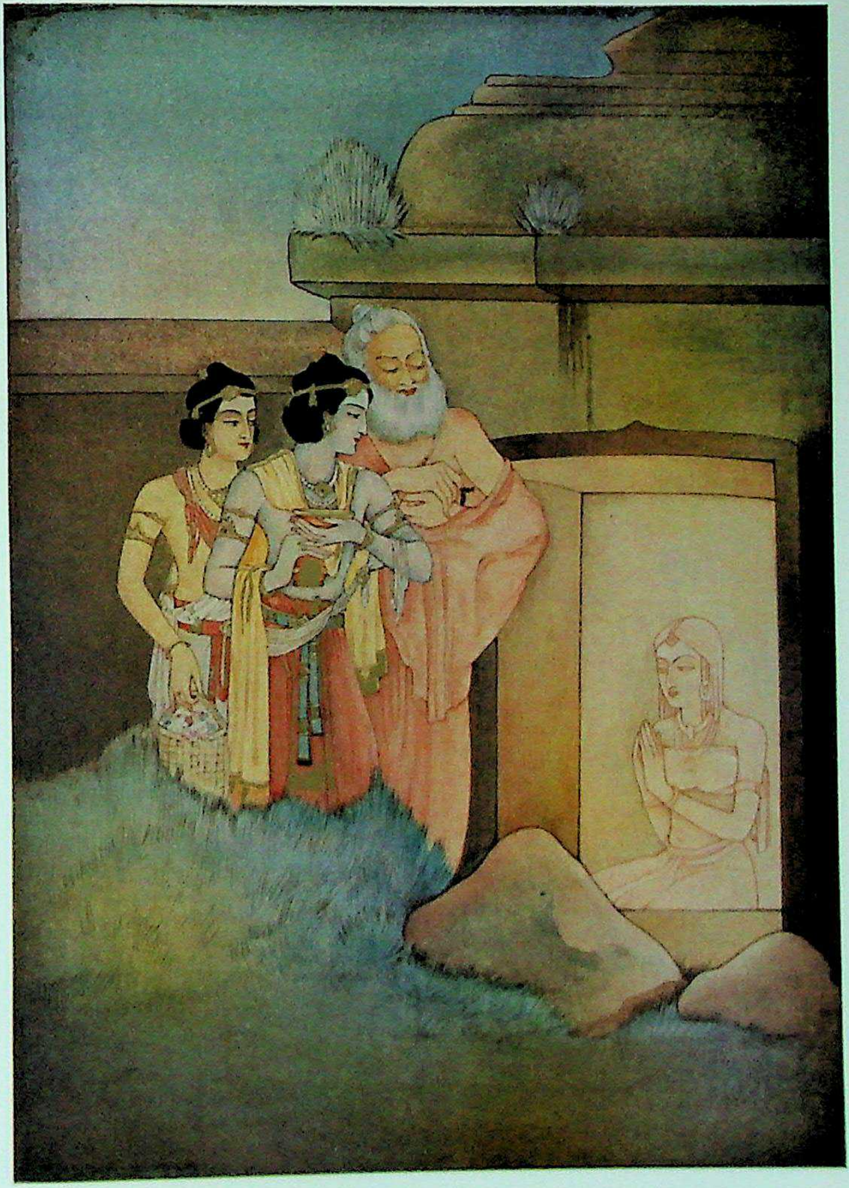
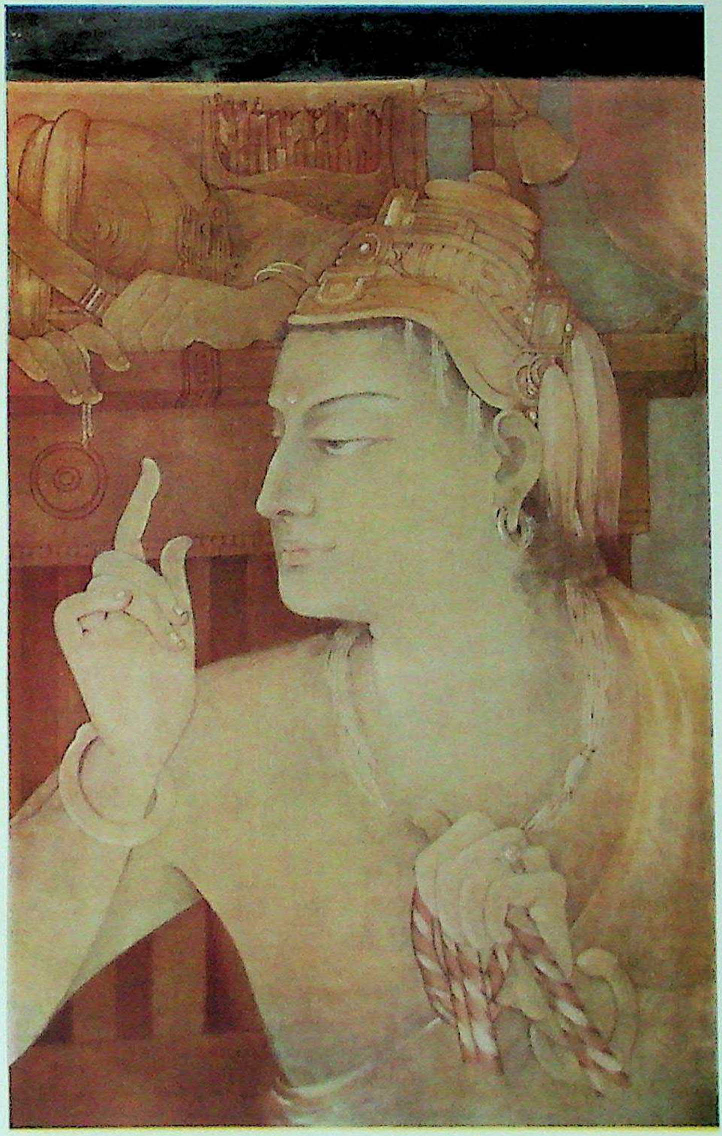


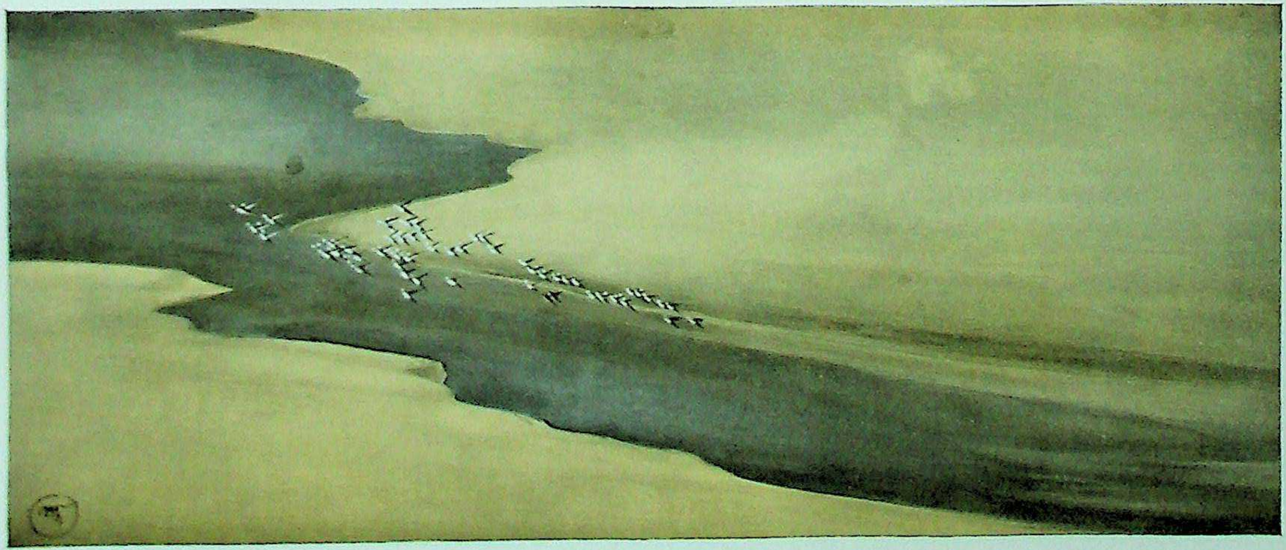
1. SATI [1908]



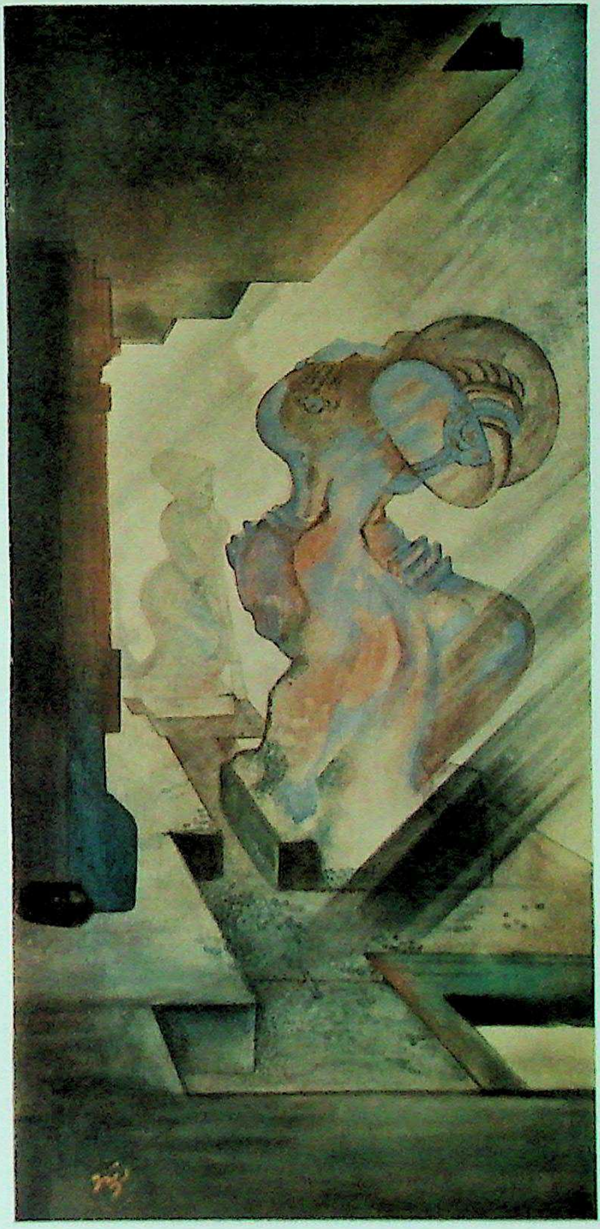
2. AHALYA REDEEMED 1910



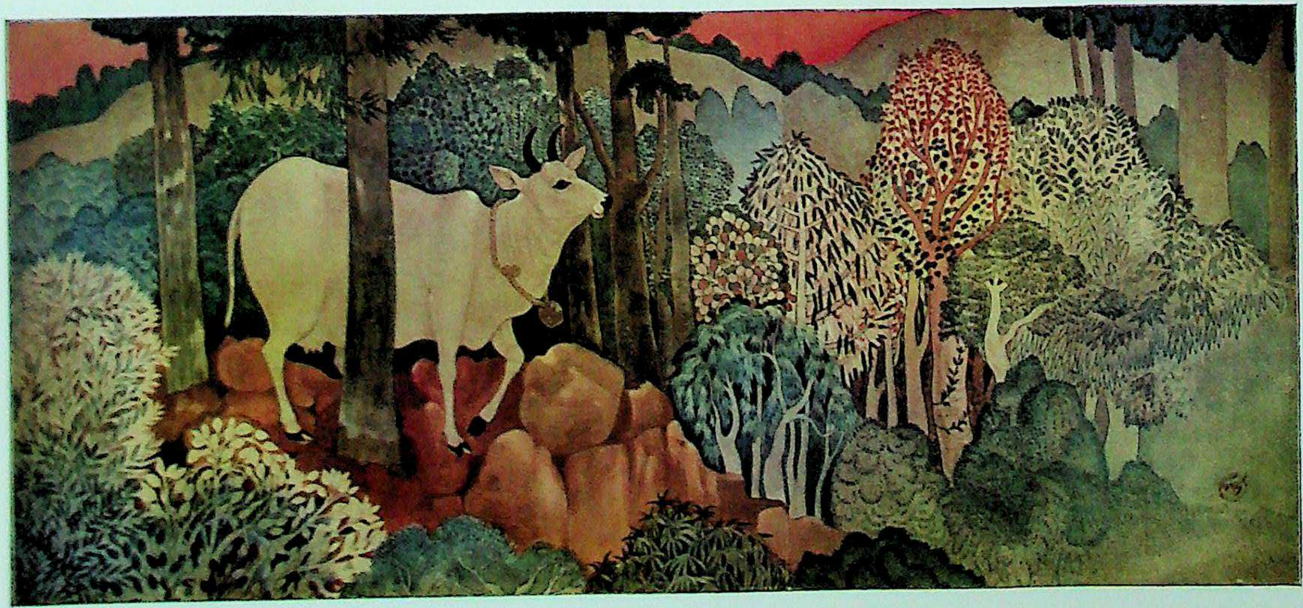
3. PARTHASARATHI 1912



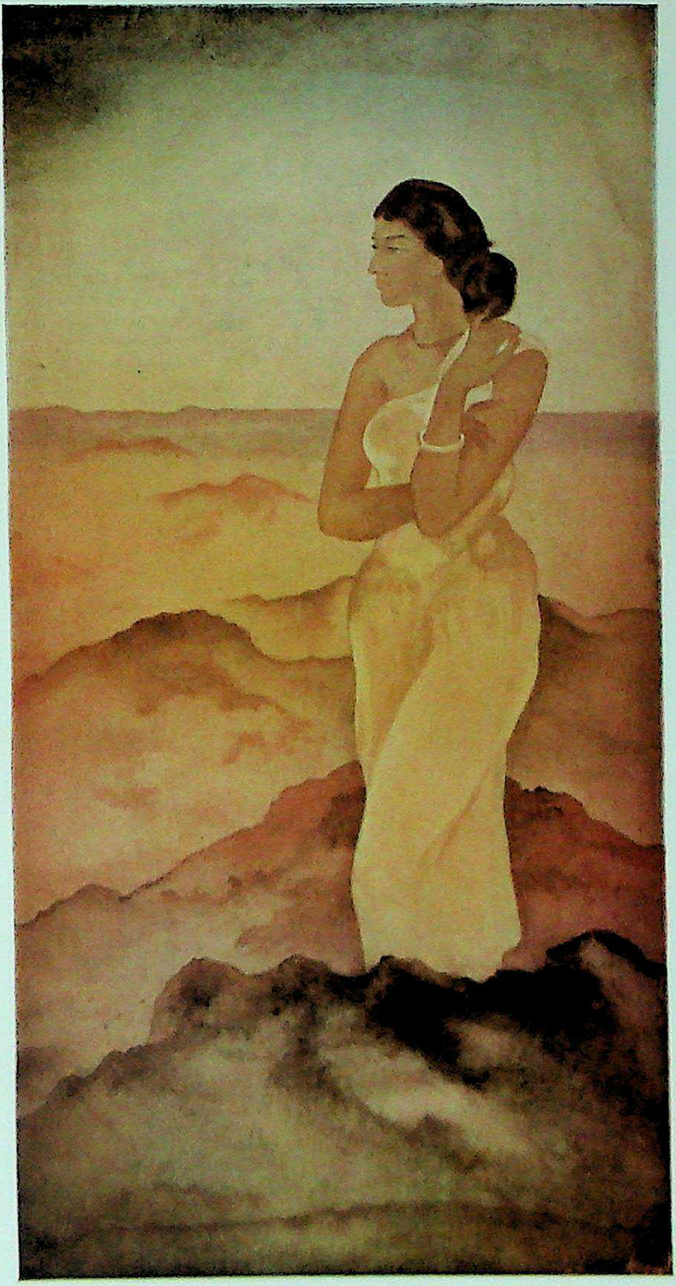
4. OVER THE PADMA IN WINTER February 1915



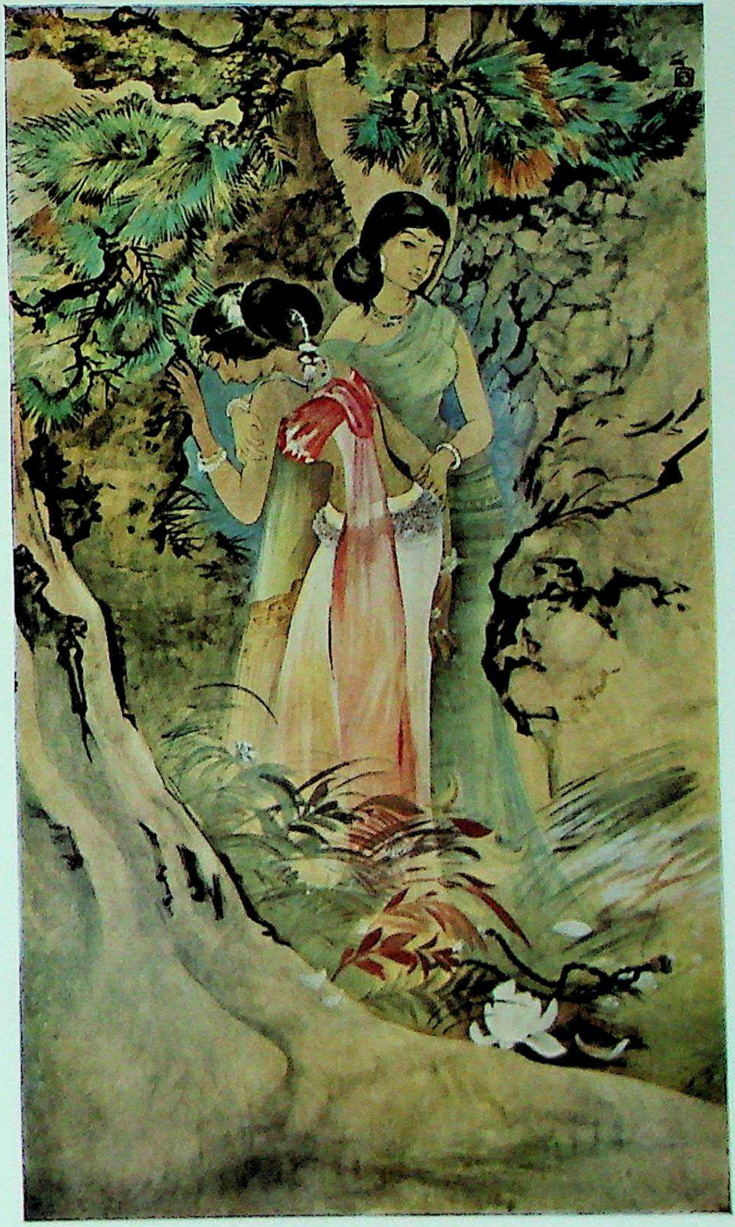
5. RAIN-SWEPT KONARAK [1917]



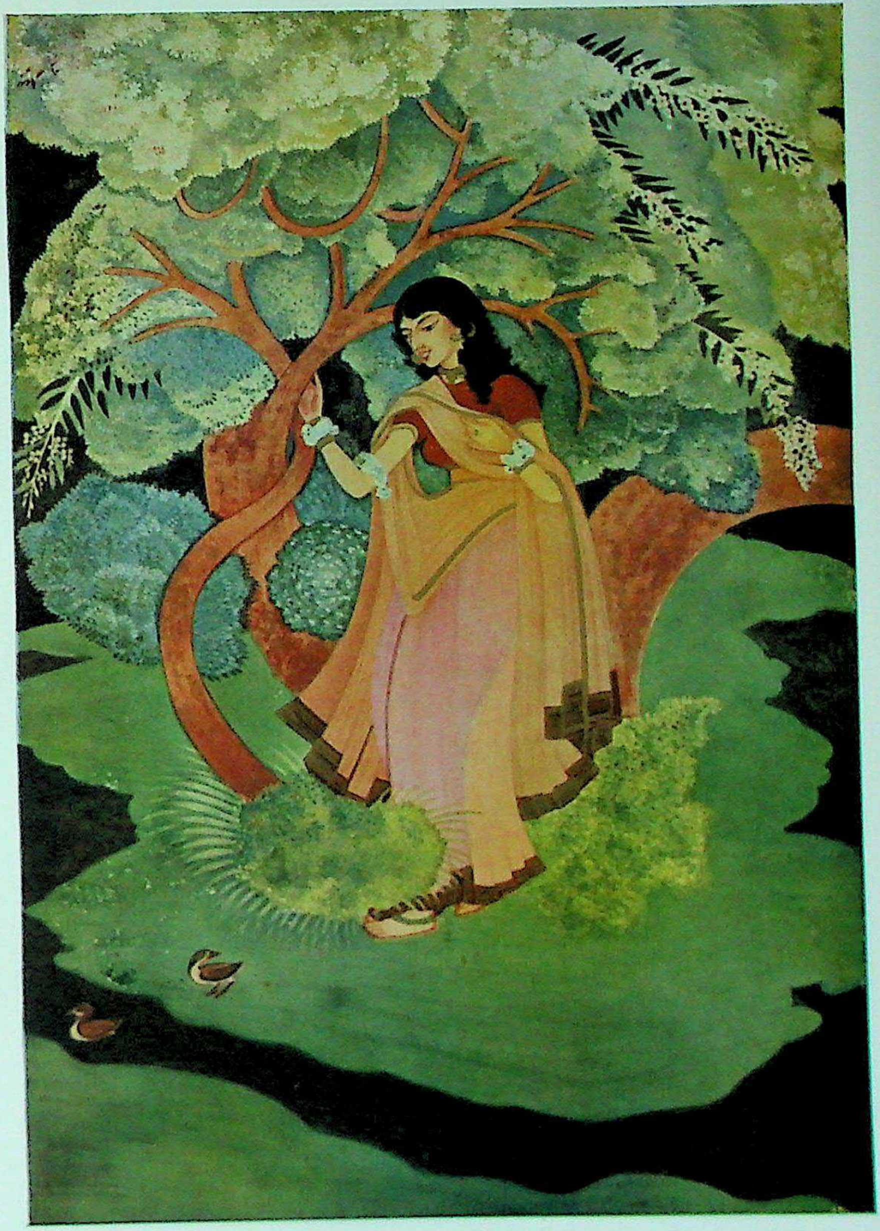
6. LOST IN THE WOODS 1918



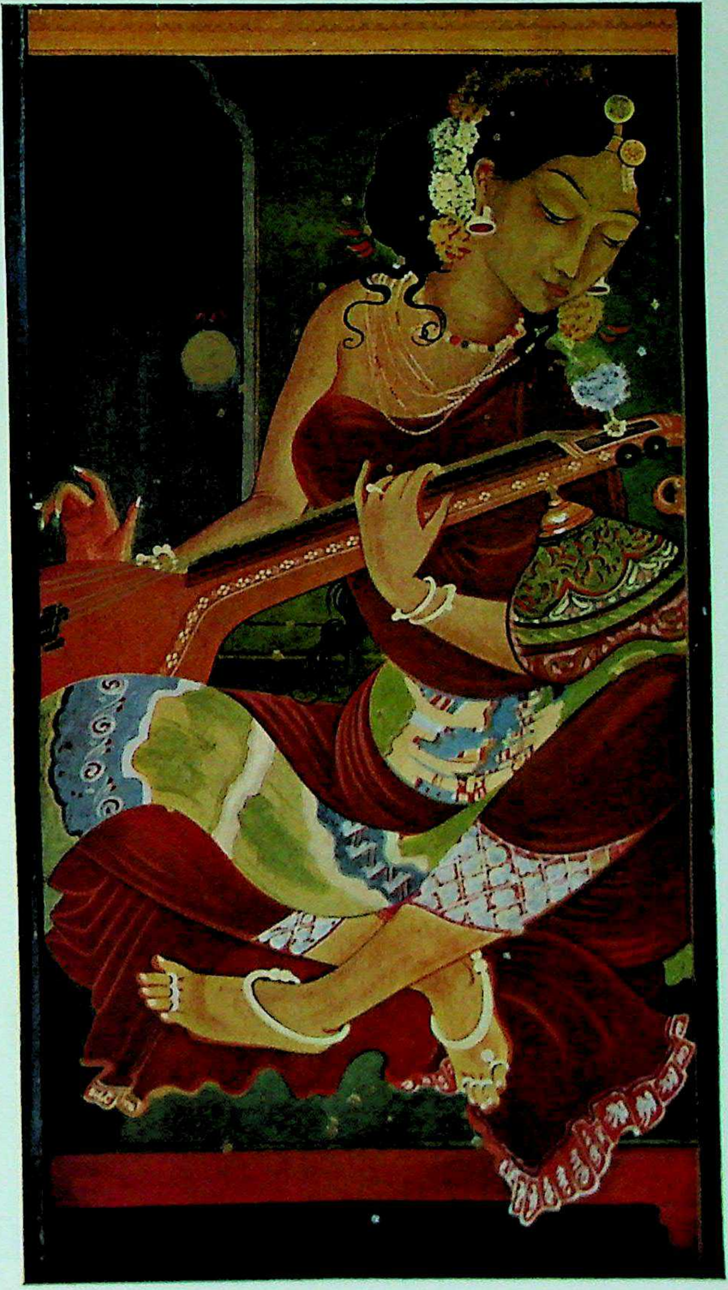
7 SANTHAL GIRL 1919



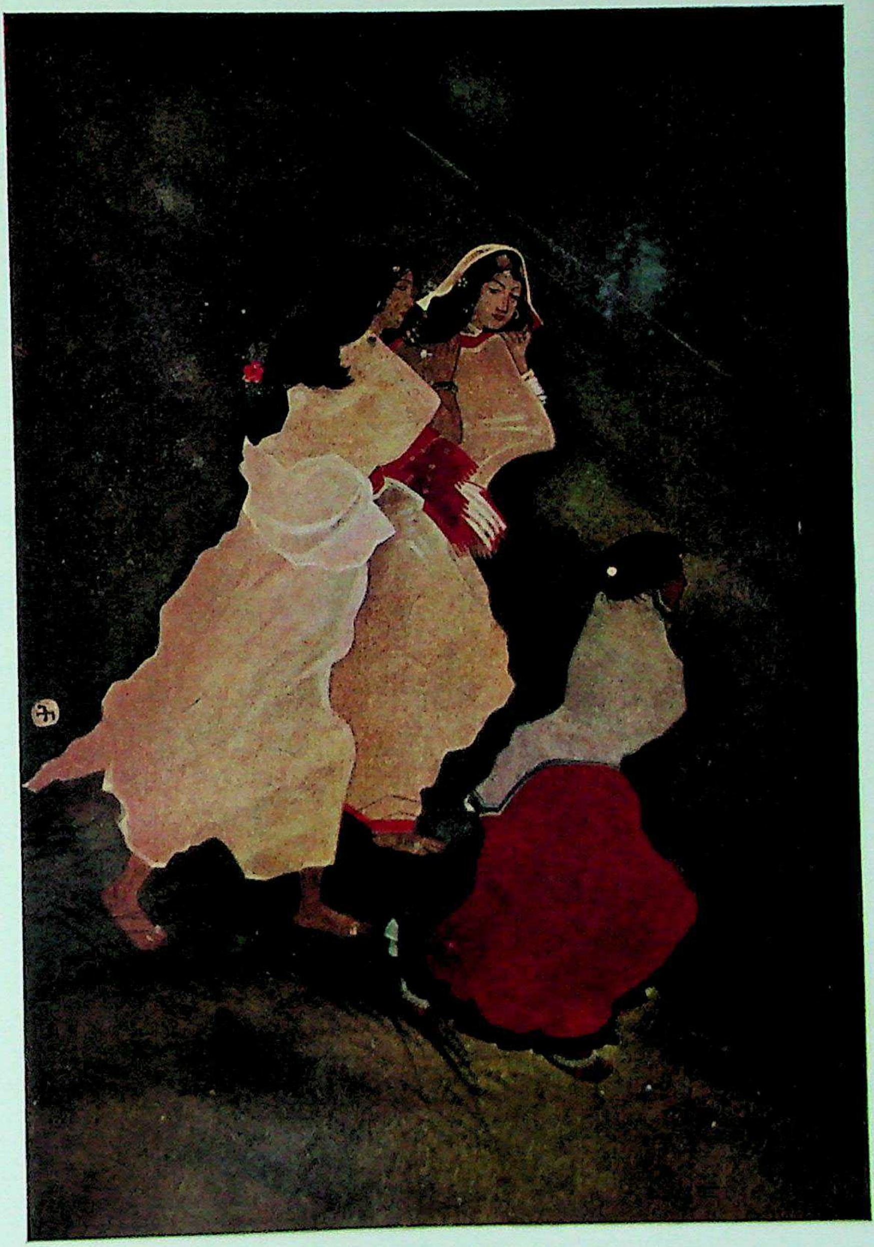
8. GRIEF OF UMA 1921



9. THE SPIRIT OF THE RAINS 1921



10 VEENA PLAYER 1922



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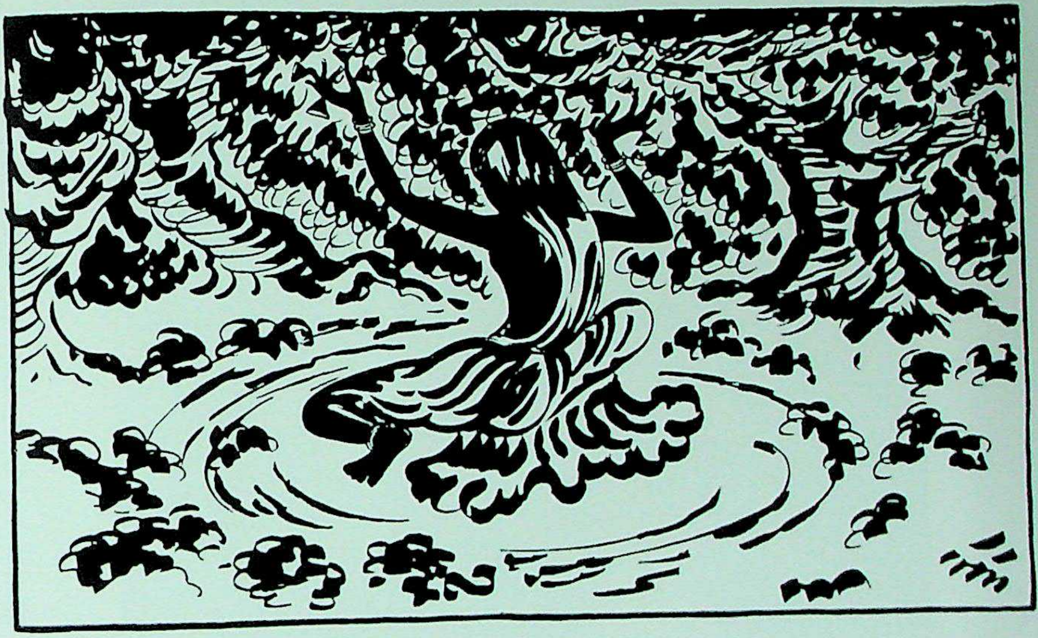
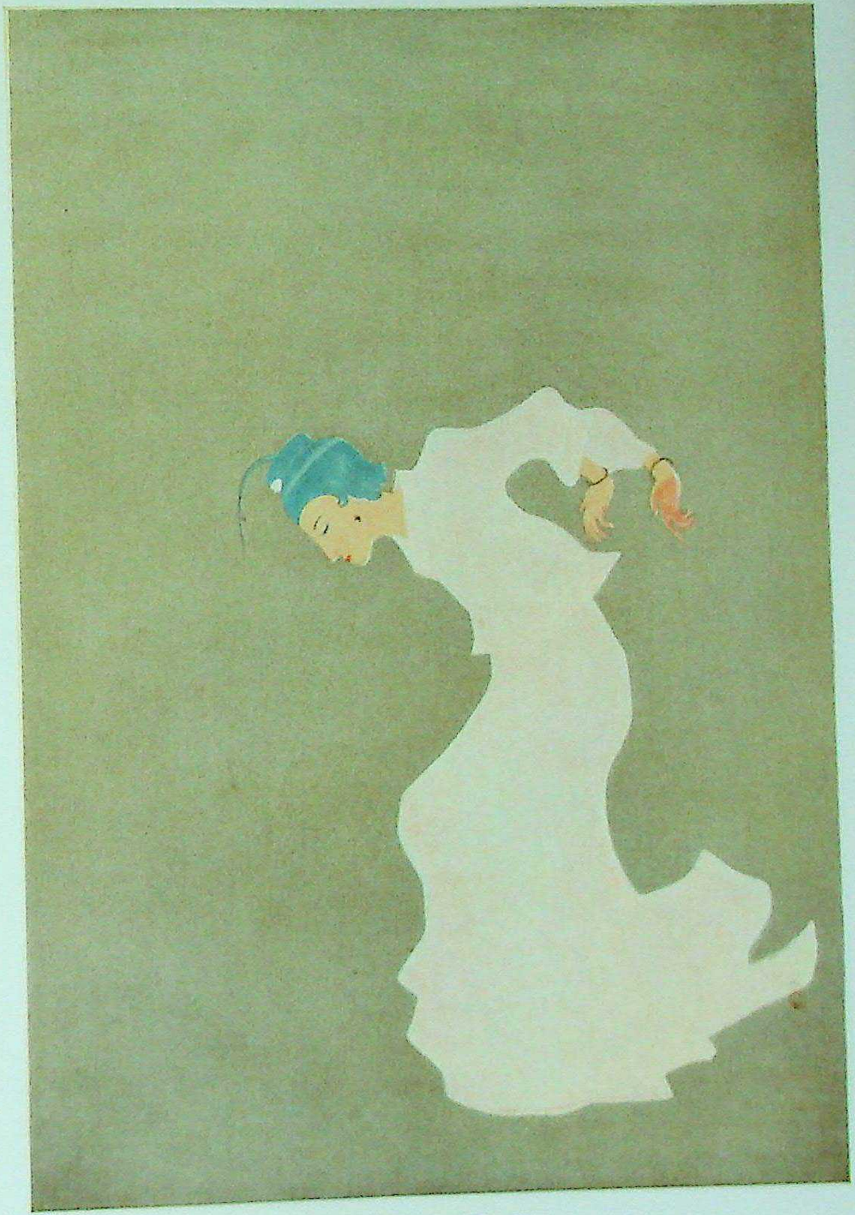
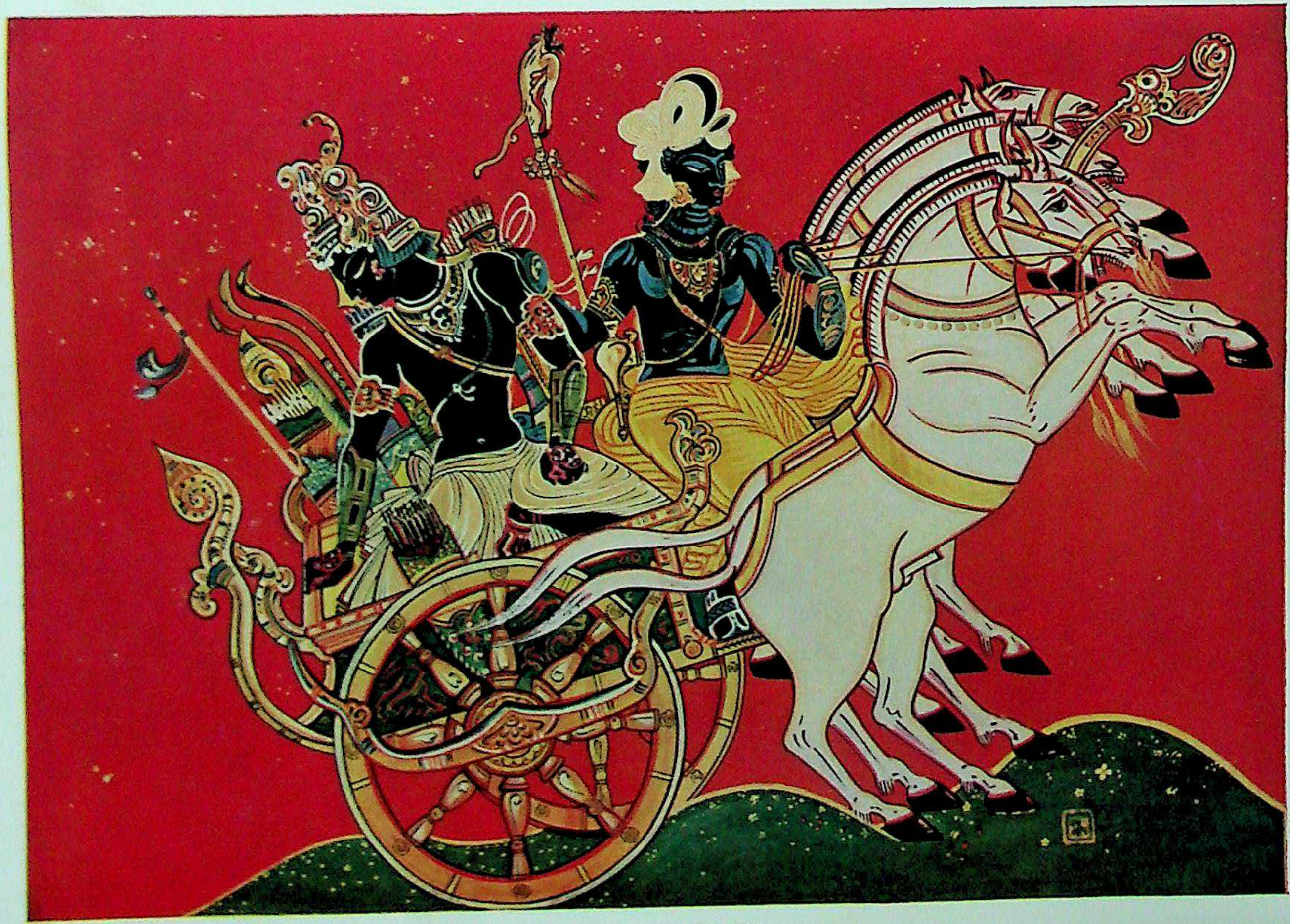


12. MANDIRA DANCE OF KATHIAWAD April 1923



13. PWE DANCE 1924



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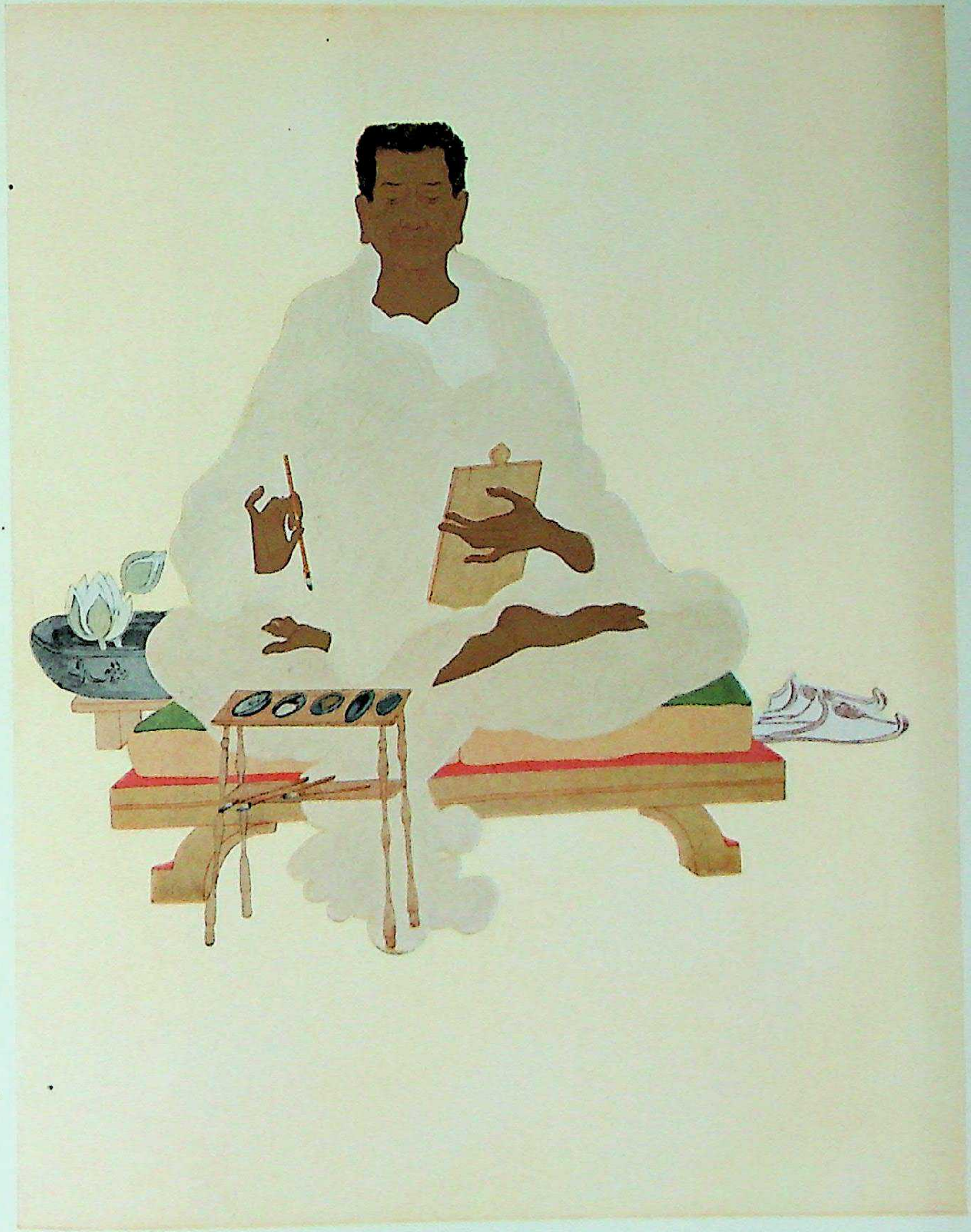
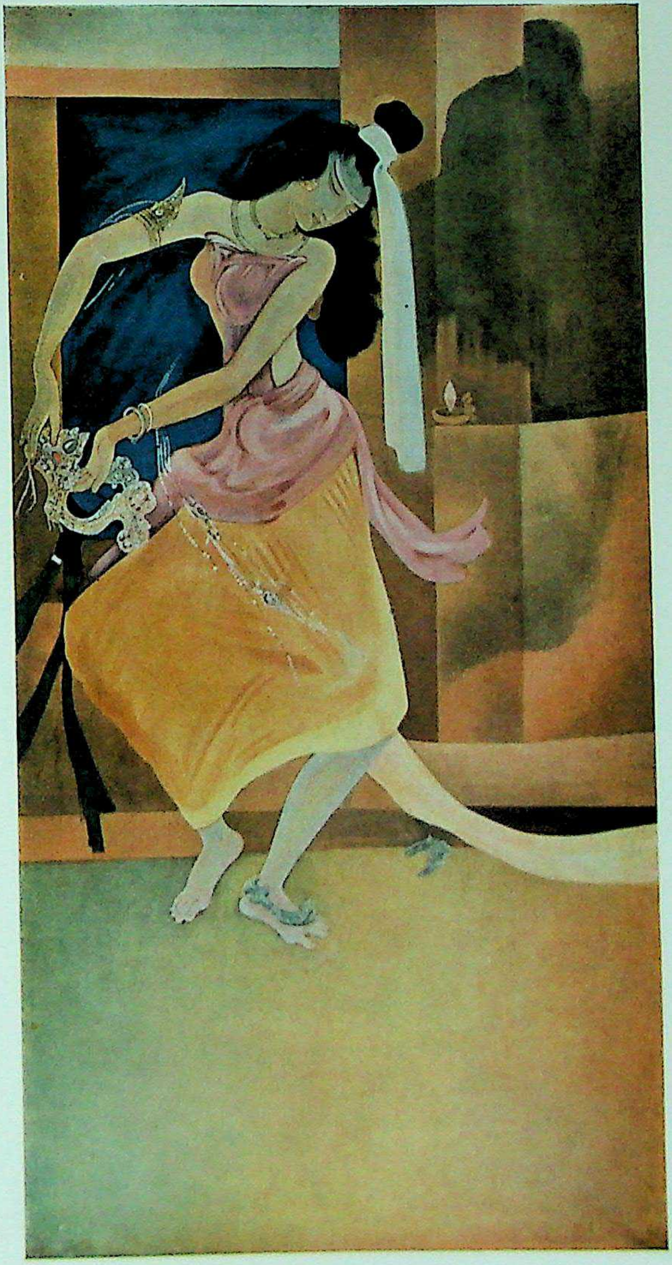
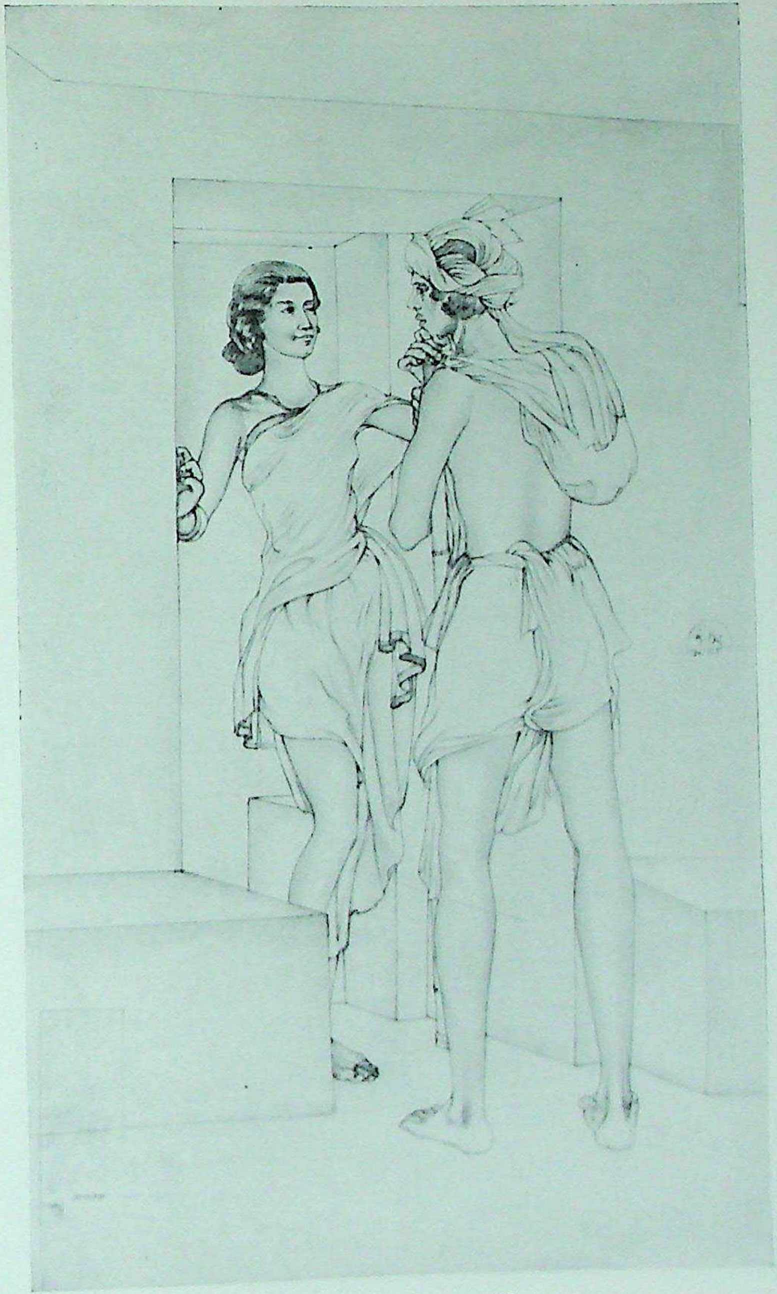


15 GURU ABANINDRANATH August 1926



16. DANCING GIRL'S WORSHIP January 1927



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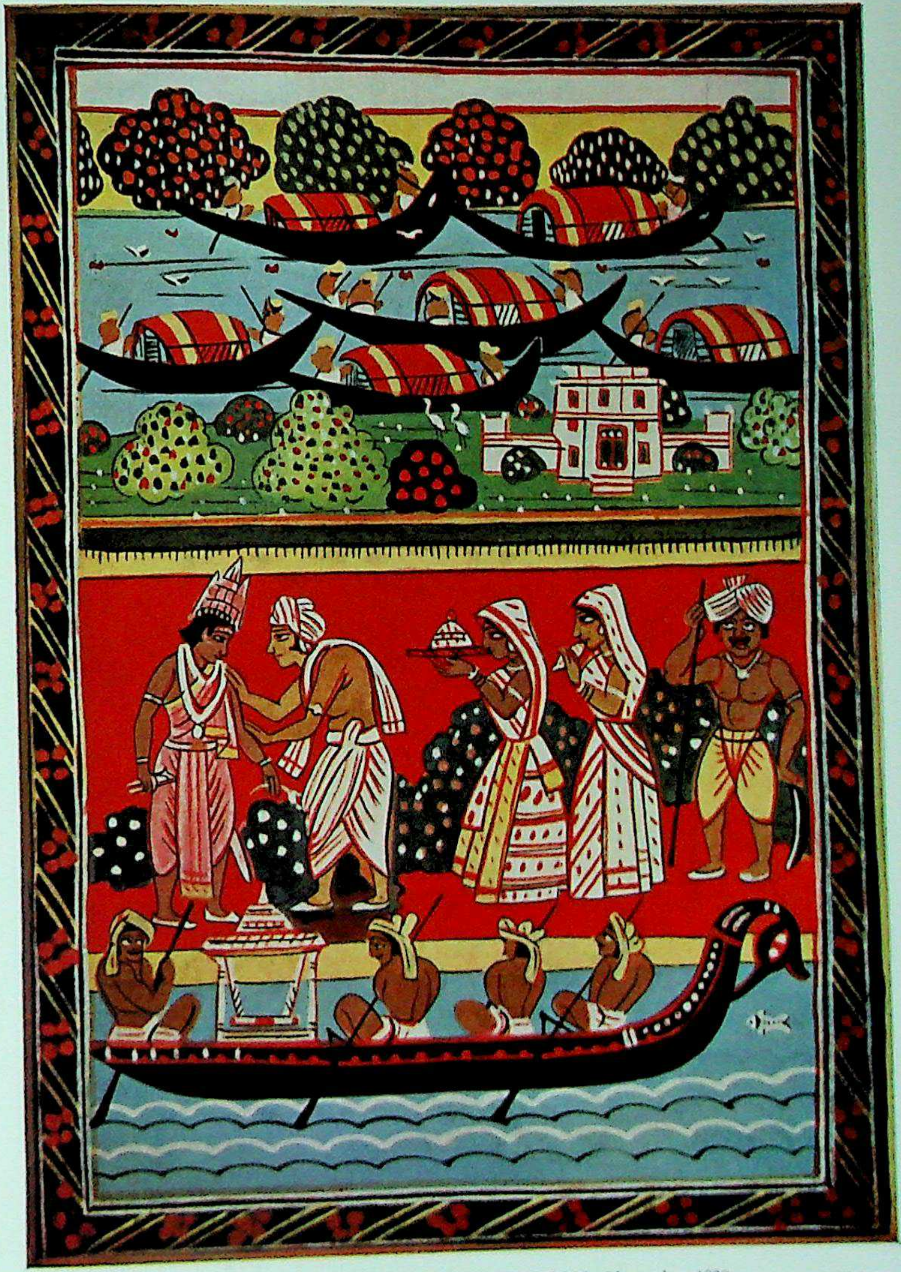
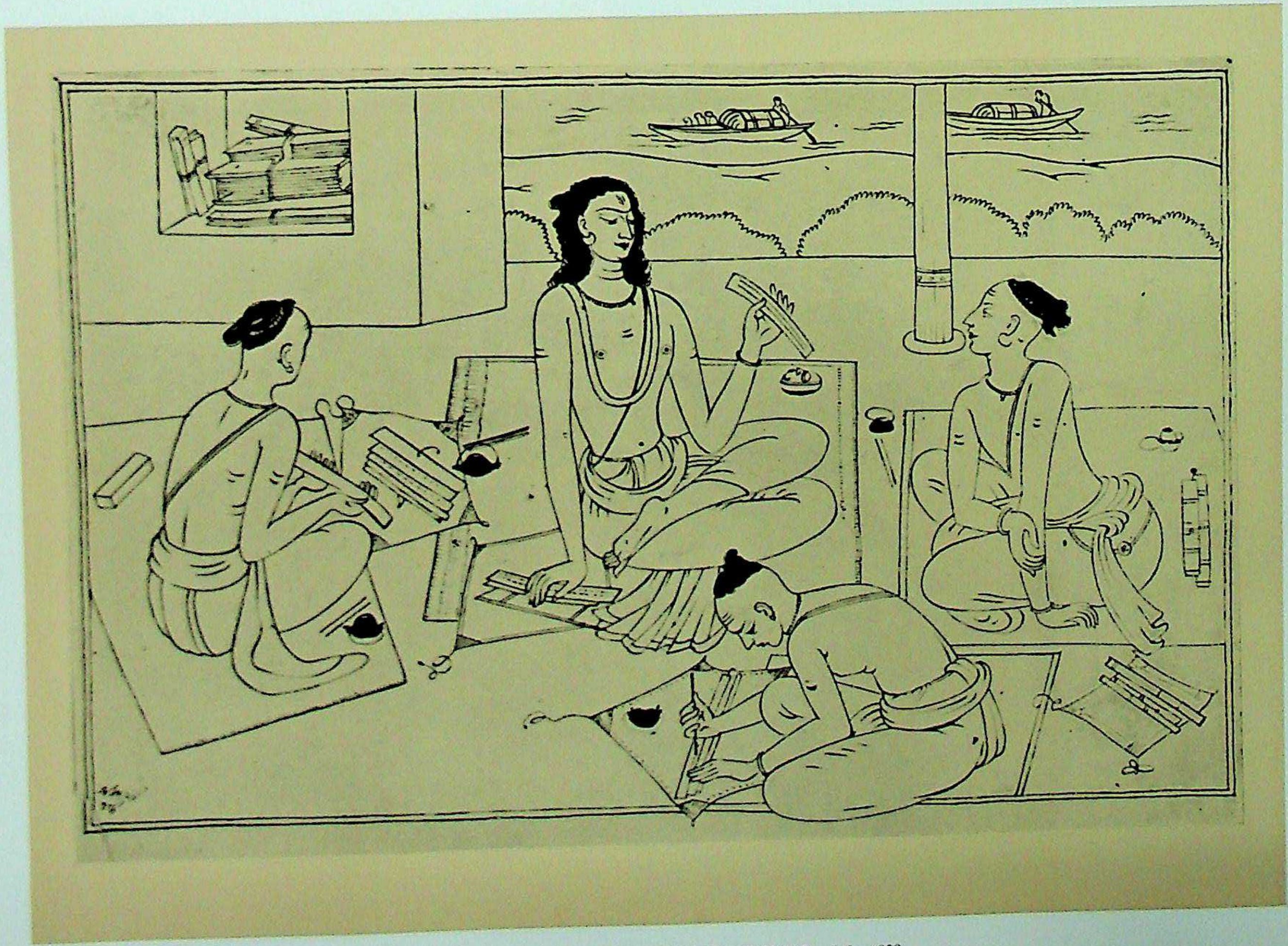
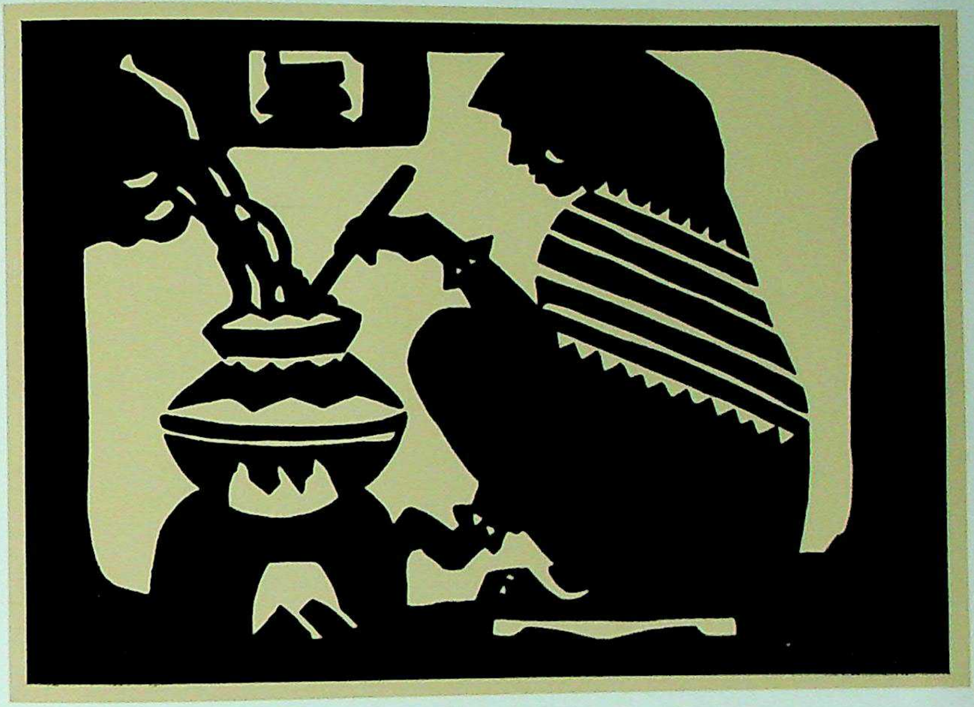


18. THE STARTING OF THE BRIDEGROOM November 1928



19. CHAITANYA TEACHING IN HIS SCHOOL July 1929



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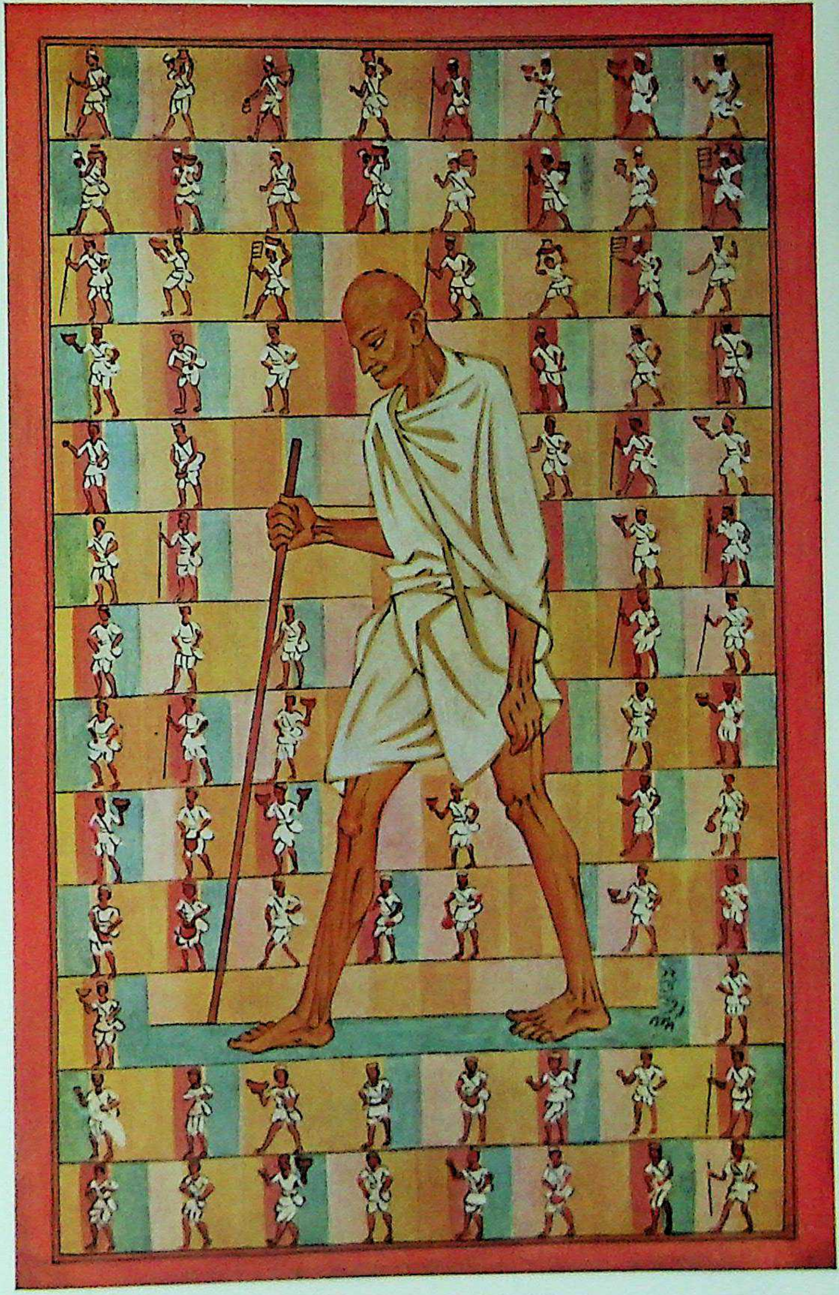
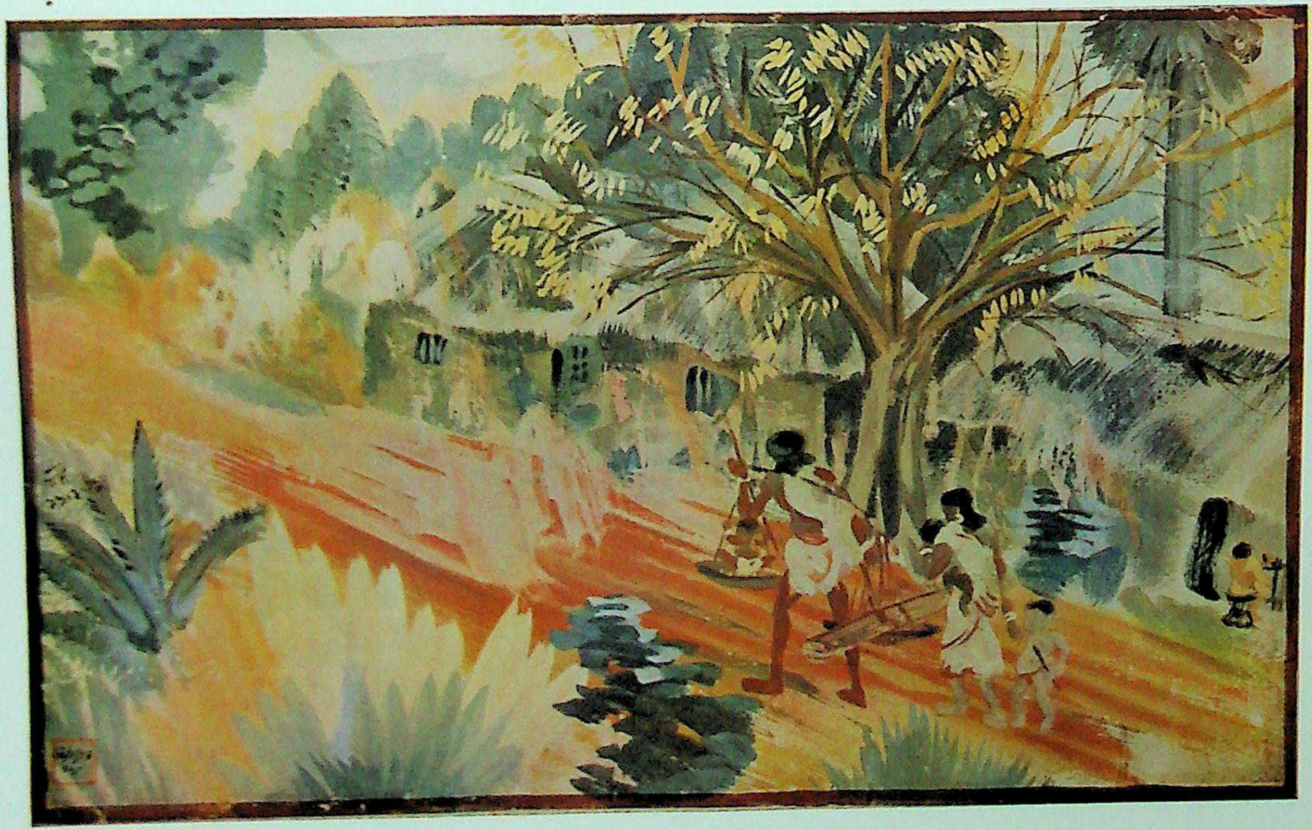
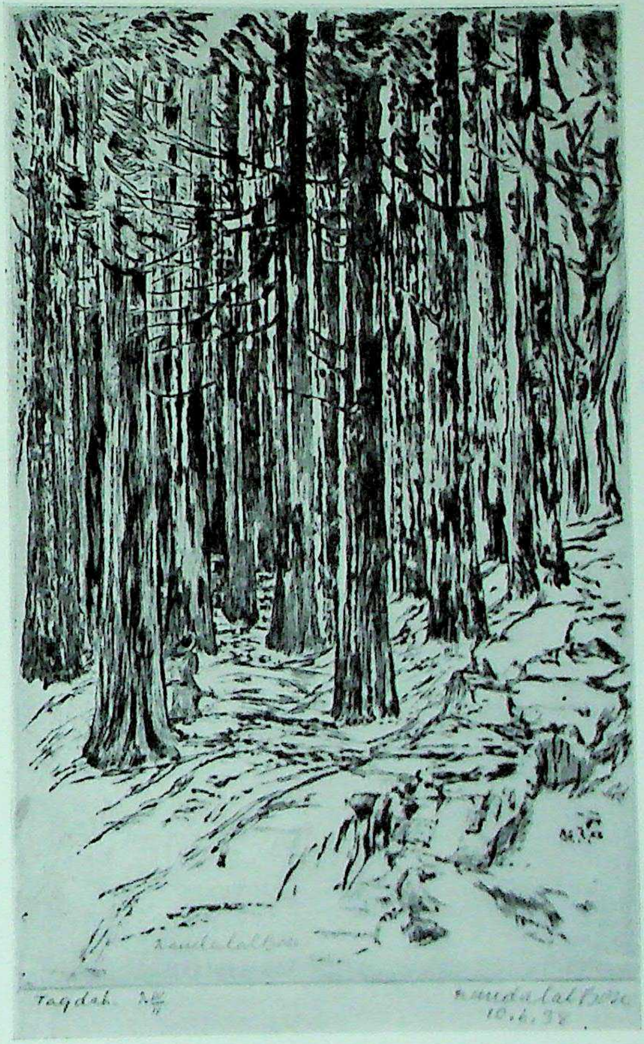


21. DANDI MARCH March 1930



22 ROAD TO BOLPUR May 1934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Nandalal Bose
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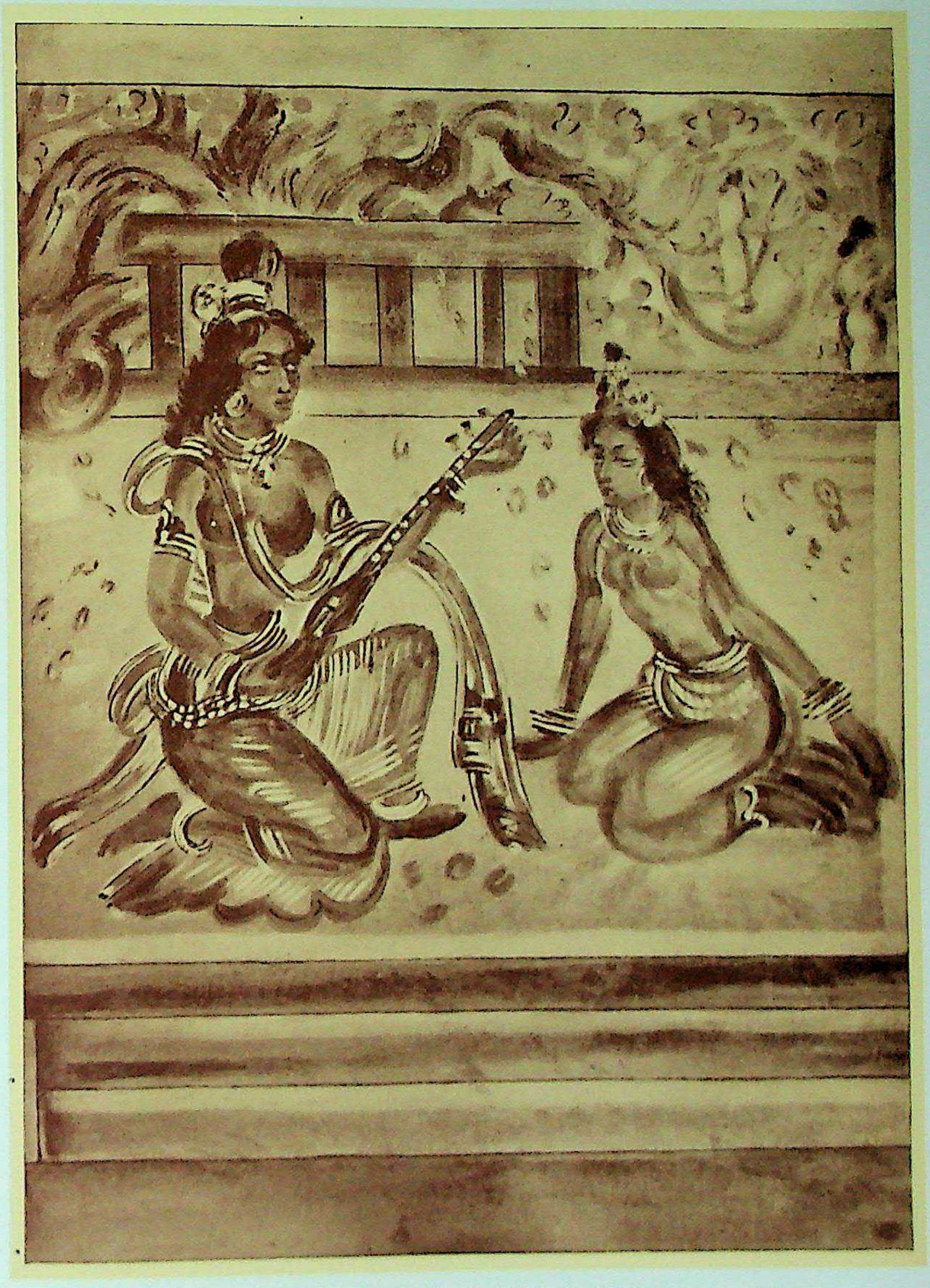
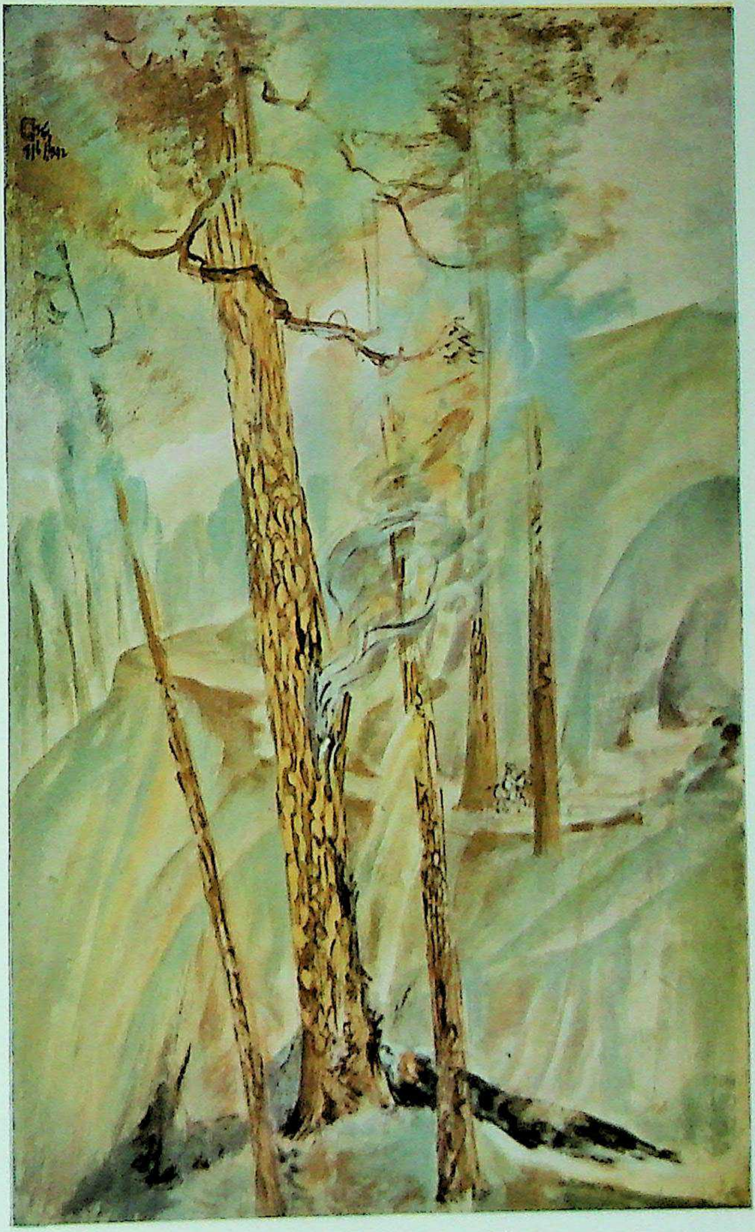
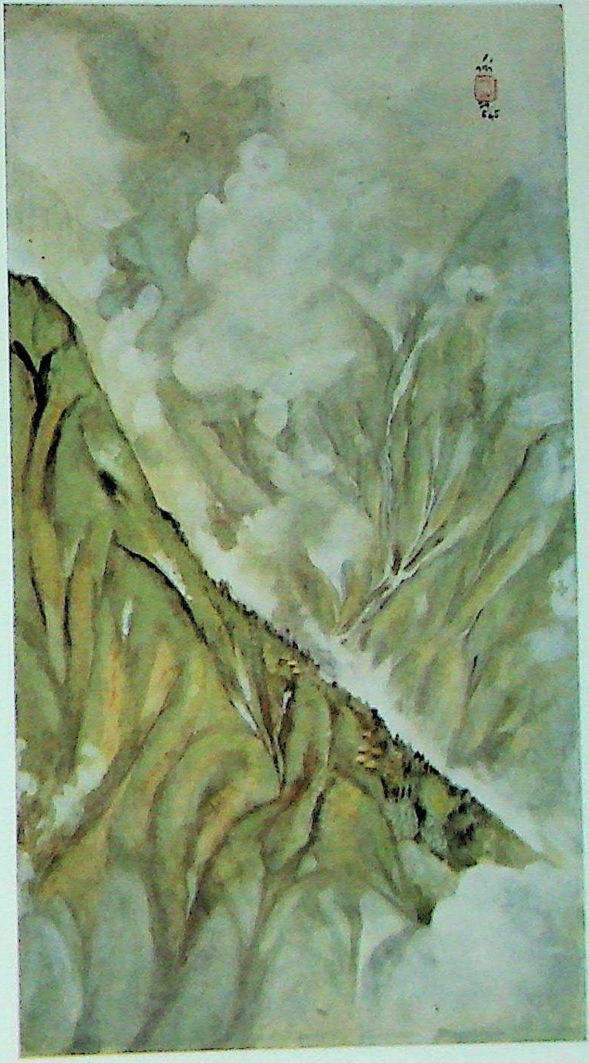
23. PINE FOREST June 1938



24. SHRIMATI AND MALATI April 1942



25. BURNING PINE June 1942



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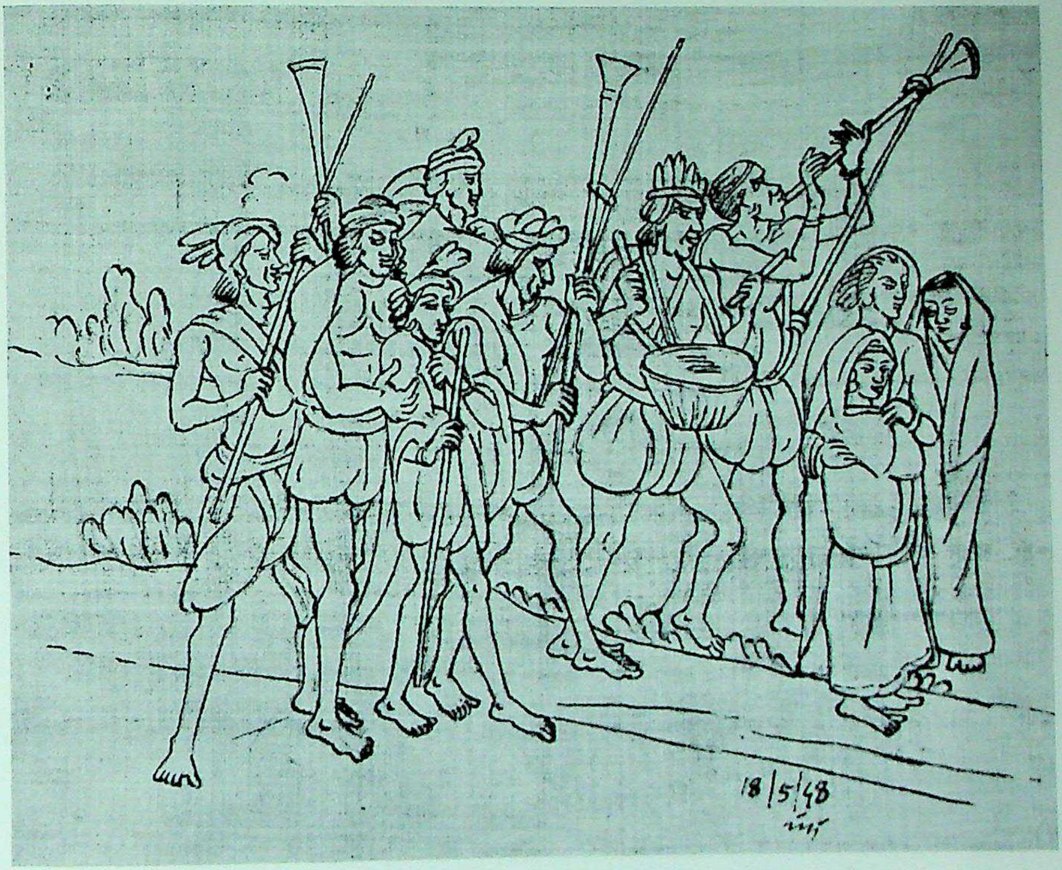

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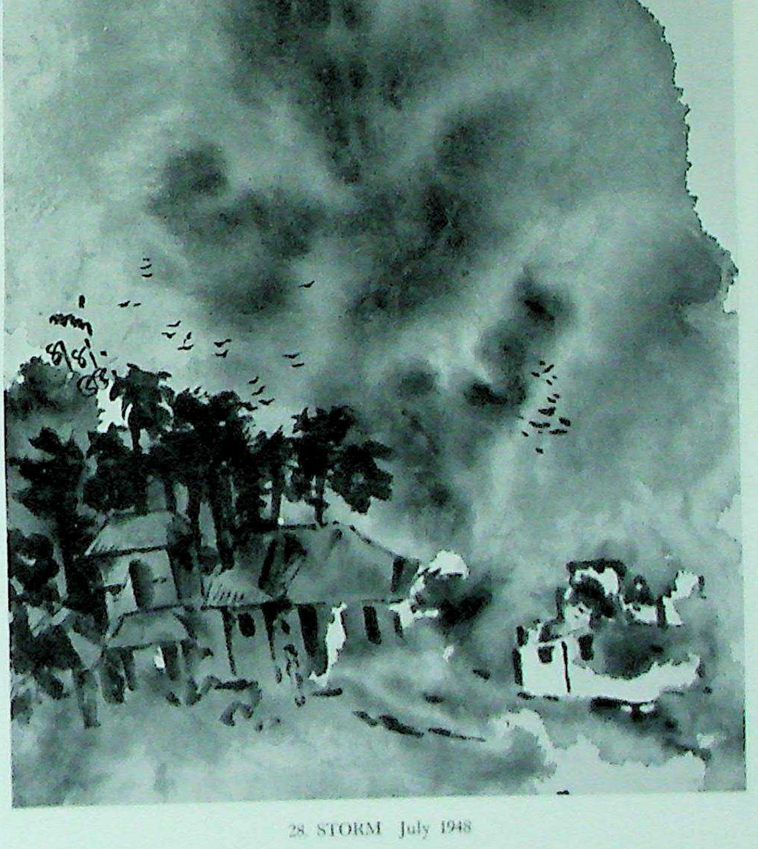
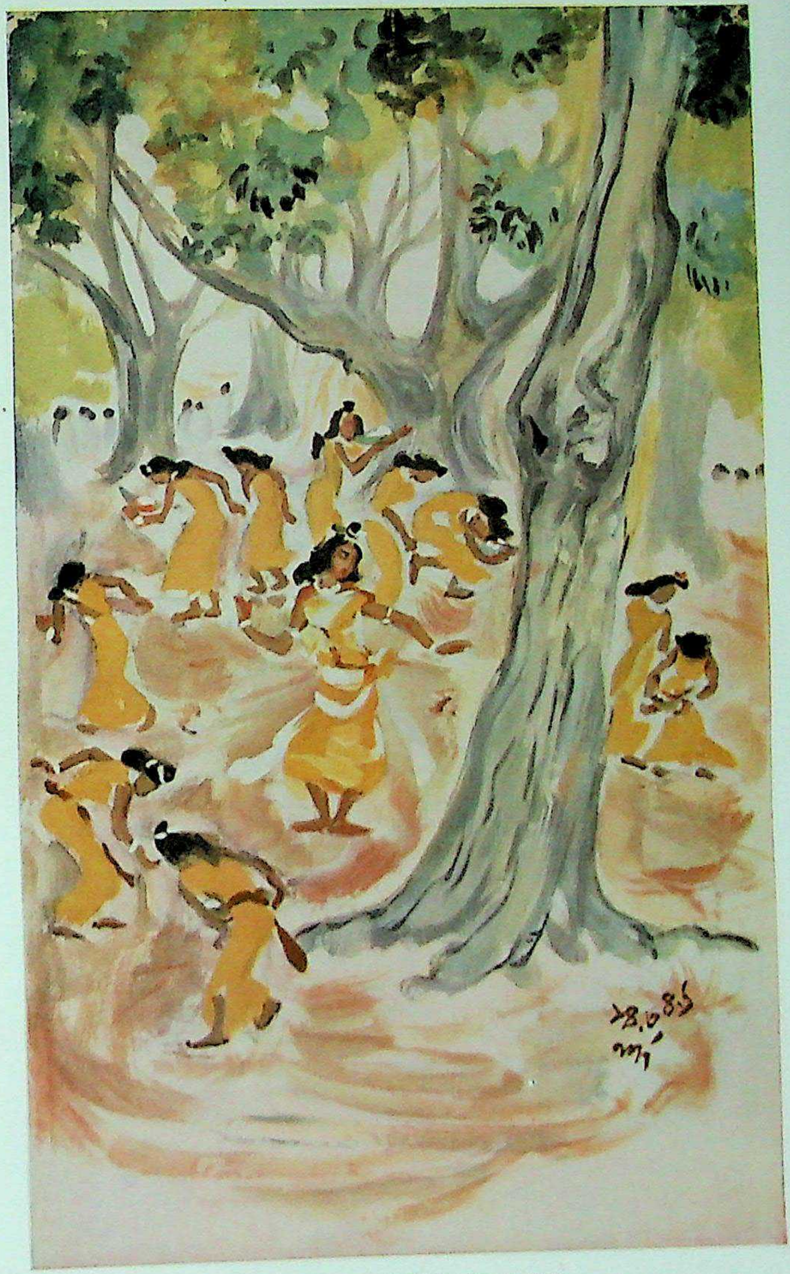
27. A SANTHAL MARRIAGE PROCESSION May 1948



28. STORM July 1948



29. SPRING FESTIVAL March 1949

ABOUT THE PLATES

PLATE 1

SATI, [*1908*], *Wash Painting, Size 12″ × 7½″*
MATERIAL: Whatman Handmade Paper
COLOURS: Burnt Sienna, Yellow Ochre, Indigo, Chrome Yellow, Vermilion, Gold.

After killing Ravana in battle, Rama sent word to Sita. Sita performed ablutions, decked herself in fine clothes and ornaments and then proceeded in a chariot to meet Rama. On seeing Sita, Rama's mind was tormented with doubts. He told Sita, "Ravana had cast lustful eyes on you; I should not by taking you back bring a slur upon my noble clan." Then Sita mournfully told Lakshmana, "I no longer wish to bear life with such slander cast on me. The funeral pyre is the only remedy; prepare one for me." When the pyre was made ready and set alight, Sita fearlessly stepped into the fire. To everyone then she looked like the vision of a golden goddess. Then again the God of Fire revealed himself in person. He removed the pyre and in his arms was Sita unharmed and with a sun-like radiance. Then the God of Fire, handed over Sita to Rama and said, "Rama, listen, take back your Sita, there is not a trace of sin in her."

Sati or Sita's ordeal of fire was painted by Nandalal when he was a student of the Government School of Art. After being exhibited in Japan in 1910, this picture was published in the art-magazine *Kokka* of Tokyo. In India, this picture won warm praise as soon as it was published in coloured wood-cut prints. On its first appearance the picture elicited the enthusiastic comment, "Its conception and artistic creativeness are the first shining landmark in the onward march of modern art." *Sati* receives mention in Abanindranath's autobiography, in which he recounts: Havell had got up a society with a few European men and women artists as members. They used to work in the Art School for an hour or two in the evenings. It was a sort of an art club, where discussions and criticisms were held, and also, on occasions, feasts. The engineer Thornton, of the Martin Company, used to look after it; everything about that art club was his look-out. Not only that, he was a big buyer too. Many of Nandalal's paintings he bought. About the time he bought Nandalal's *Sati* we had decided to get the best pictures printed and put into circulation. Some we did get printed and they turned out fine. *Sati* and a few other paintings were carefully packed and despatched to Japan for reproduction in print. Okakura, Taikan and others made the arrangements. The reproductions came back after being printed in coloured wood-cut. Thornton's *Sati* also came back. When Thornton unpacked the picture he couldn't recognise it at all. "Come sharp," he sent word to me, "something strange has happened; *Sati* is changed somehow. It's no longer the original *Sati*." I went posthaste; "What could it be," I asked myself and then saw that really indeed the *Sati's* complexion had turned into the colour of ashes, as it were. It was just like old silver in distemper. "Why has this happened?" Thornton asked. "Paint has discoloured, but how I don't know," I replied. "Can't it be restored?" Thornton asked. "No, that's not possible," said I. Thornton felt dejected; his *Sati* in such a wretched state! In those days we ourselves used to buy a lot of paintings. I had been keen on having *Sati*. I couldn't get it because Thornton had taken it off. I told Thornton, "If you have no use for it, then let me have the picture and you take some other picture in exchange of it." So I brought *Sati* home and started thinking what could be done about it. It came to my mind that I had read in some book that if kept in open air and light, colour recovered its natural hue. Maybe, I thought, the colour had changed through chemical action as the picture had been packed and covered with zinc; heat of the zinc and sultry air of the ship might have done it. I hung up the picture by the side of the window in my bedroom. Light from the east every day rested on it and there the picture remained. Some time after, I noticed one day that *Sati's* colour had changed; the original hue had come back to her body again. Light had, as it were, washed off her burnt colour. I called in Thornton to have a look at the picture. Everybody was amazed. "What ! Are you itching for it ?" I asked Thornton, "but you won't get it back. On coming to me, *Sati's* colour has returned. Could I again hand it back to you ?" Thornton laughed and said, "No, let it be yours."

The picture was reproduced in E. B. Havell's *Ideals Of Indian Art* and later noted with appreciation in Coomaraswamy's *Art And Swadeshi*.

PLATE 2
AHALYA REDEEMED, 1910, Wash Painting, Size 8½″ × 6¼″

MATERIAL : Whatman Handmade Paper
COLOURS : Cobalt Blue, Chrome Yellow, Light Red, Burnt Sienna, Indigo.

For having violated the sanctity of marriage, Ahalya, the beautiful consort of the sage Gautama was condemned to rot in the form of a rock by her husband. Before Gautama's curse became effective she implored him piteously to soften it at least if he could not recall it. At this he took pity on her and said that she would be purified once again when Lord Vishnu in the incarnation of Rama would deliver her from his curse. Now invisible and secure in the amorphous obscurity of a piece of stone Ahalya fell asleep in the hermitage of her husband.

Thousands of years passed by. At last one day Rama accompanied by Lakshmana and led by the sage Visvamitra came to the hermitage on his way to Mithila. At the touch of Rama's feet, Ahalya sprang to new life and regained her pristine purity.

While a student of the Government School of Art Nandalal painted a series illustrating Ramayana episodes. *Ahalya Redeemed* belongs to that series.

PLATE 3
PARTHASARATHI, 1912, Wash Painting, Size 31″ × 21″

MATERIAL : Cartridge Paper
COLOURS : Burnt Sienna, Yellow Ochre, Indigo, Emerald Green, Cobalt Blue, Indigo, Red. Hardly any sharp or bright colour visible—the whole general tone—bluish grey—lightened with white, yellow and light red.

When the vast armies of the Kauravas and the Pandavas stood arrayed on the famous battlefield of Kurukshetra, Partha (Arjuna) asked his charioteer (Sarathi), Krishna, to place the chariot between the two contending armies. After having a look at his kinsmen and relatives Arjuna was suddenly overwhelmed with an infinite sense of grief at the grim prospect of killing them. Telling Krishna that he preferred his own death to fighting and killing his kinsmen and relations, he laid down the weapons and sat motionless on the chariot. It was at this juncture that Krishna adjured Arjuna to overcome his faint-heartedness and to be ready to fight for his right as well as to fulfil his duty as a Kshatriya.

Parthasarathi was painted after his return from the Buddhist Cave temple at Ajanta where Nandalal with a group of artists had copied the wall paintings for over three months.

The picture was exhibited in Calcutta and sold to Norman Blunt, a noted connoisseur of Indian arts and crafts. It was Blunt who had introduced Abanindranath Tagore to E.B. Havell. While in England, Norman Blunt being in pecuniary difficulties wrote to Abanindranath if he could secure a buyer for the *Parthasarathi*. The latter himself offered to purchase and brought back the painting to India.

Since *Parthasarathi*, the artist has made several attempts in this style. It is interesting to note that none of them reflects the same depth of idea.

PLATE 4

OVER THE PADMA IN WINTER, February 1915, Wash Painting, Size 36" × 15½"

Material : Cartridge Paper

Colours : Neutral Tint, Blue Black, Gamboge, Chinese White.

In the winter of 1915, Poet Tagore invited Nandalal and two other artists, Surendranath Kar and Mukul De to Shelidah, the seat of his estate in North Bengal. There they spent over a month in many places living with the River Padma—partly in boat, partly in tent on the riverside or on sand banks. During the rainy season, the swollen, swift-moving Padma, a name of the Ganga as it flows through central Bengal before joining the Brahmaputra, turns into a vast sheet of water when from one bank of the river the other bank becomes almost invisible. In winter, the river presents quite another picture. The waters recede and the submerged lands come up again, many in the form of islands. There the wild ducks gather by hundreds of thousands and the swift waters are outspread to the farthest point of the horizon. There are scenic pictures all around.

Nandalal also painted here a few pictures for illustrating Tagore's book, a collection of poems.

PLATE 5

RAIN-SWEPT KONARAK [1917], Wash Painting, Size 60" × 26"

Material : Cartridge Paper

Colours : Burnt Sienna, Yellow Ochre, Indian Red, Chinese Ink, Emerald Green, Mica.

Konarak Surya Deul, for its size "the most richly ornamental building—extremely at least—in the whole world" was erected in the middle of the Thirteenth Century by Narasinhadeva and dedicated to the Sun God. It stands today on a lonely stretch of sea coast north-east of Puri in Orissa. The entire sanctuary was conceived as an architectural likeness of the Sun God's chariot, which gives an illusion as though it is actually flying through the sky. On the terraces of the roof, as interruptions to the lines of the cornices, are monumental statues of female musicians, Surasundaris. They have massive heroic beauty quite in keeping with their function of serving as architectural ornaments to be seen from a great distance.

The visit to Konarak in 1917 introduced a new factor to the evolution of Nandalal's artistic genius. He was accompanied by Surendranath Kar and the Japanese artist, Kampo Arai San. The temple provided the young artists with subjects for scores of sketches. This picture was done later in Calcutta.

PLATE 6

LOST IN THE WOODS, 1918, Wash Painting, Size 18" × 8"

Material : Cartridge Paper

Colours : Emerald Green, Yellow Ochre, Burnt Sienna, Indian Red, Chinese Ink, Chinese White.

A forest scene of low hill range around Kharagpur where the artist was born and where he spent his boyhood days. It was painted in Calcutta during the period he undertook commissioned work at *Basu Vijnan Mandir*. The young artist, when he heard a criticism about its balance and composition, cut the picture outright into two. But later he found his original composition and scheme to be correct and rejoined the two pieces together.

PLATE 7

SANTHAL GIRL, 1919, Wash Painting, Size 51" × 26½"

Material : Cartridge Paper

Colours : Chinese Ink, Indian Red, Burnt Sienna, Yellow Ochre, Burnt Chrome lightened with white.

Abanindranath Tagore in his Calcutta house planted and dwarfed in Japanese style a banyan tree in a pot. In time the banyan attained its maturity but its height was still a few inches only. Abanindranath decorated the pot with stone chips. When Nandalal joined Santiniketan in 1919 Abanindranath presented the tree to Nandalal. At Santiniketan Nandalal broke the pot and planted the tree in the courtyard of the then Kala-Bhabana. Soon by the sheer impulse of its life-force the dwarfish tree grew up in stature. Looking at the liberated, lively tree Nandalal said, "Between the life of this tree and my own life there is much in common." After Calcutta, away from the city's noise and bustle Nandalal felt a sense of liberation in the solitude of the open spaces at Santiniketan. Nature took possession of the artist's mind. Here there were uninterrupted views of fields on all sides, with stretches of red gravel-strewn undulating land intervening to add variety to the scene. There were Santhal girls collecting dry leaves and broken twigs and branches of trees; Santhal boys grazing cows or with bows and arrows roving in *sal* forests.

Nandalal painted his *Santhal Girl* soon after coming to Santiniketan. On the occasion of Visva-Bharati's inauguration learned men from all over the world gathered at Santiniketan. They used to hold discussions in the large hall of the Kala-Bhabana. With this picture, *Santhal Girl*, Nandalal decorated the hall. The picture was made according to the size of a niche in the wall of the hall. The picture looked like a fresco when it was fixed.

Santhal Girl was the first picture executed during the artist's transitional period when he was coming into close contact with nature.

PLATE 8
GRIEF OF UMA, 1921, Tempera, Size 53" × 31"
Material : Cartridge Paper
Colours : Chinese Ink, Emerald Stone Dust, Cobalt Blue, Vermilion, Japanese White, Indian Red, Yellow Ochre.

From the legend of Shiva which Kalidasa has immortalised in his Kumarasambhabam. The gods were bent on procuring the reunion of Shiva and Sakti in her new incarnation, Uma —the beautiful daughter of Himalaya. The beautiful damsel came dressed in her hill robe and stone beads and flowers attended by her maid and her companions. They brought about a meeting at the moment when Shiva was made to shake off for a few moments his mood of eternal contemplation under the spell of Madan's bow. Such a union could after all be only physical and Uma had made no spiritual preparation for it. Shiva was very much enraged at Madan's impertinence and from Shiva's "angry eyes' restless flashes scorched the gentle King of Love to ashes." Then the Great God left the spot—leaving the disappointed maid immersed in grief and shame. Grief—for she loved, and all her love was vain and shame,—for she was spurned before her youthful train.

PLATE 9
THE SPIRIT OF THE RAINS, 1921, Tempera, Size 11" × 8"
Material : Whatman Handmade Paper
Colours : Collyrium, Emerald Green, Light Red, Indian Red, Yellow Ochre, Gold.

Painted after his return to Santiniketan from the Bagh Cave temples in Gwalior State. This picture is an artistic vision of Santiniketan during the rains. It has a link with a lyric by Tagore:

See, from the bosom of the storm-cloud
Comes the rain with streaming hair

PLATE 10
VEENA PLAYER, 1922, Tempera, Size 17½" × 9½"
Material : Teak Wood
Colours : Yellow Ochre, Terra Verde, Indian Red, Cobalt Blue, Green, Gold, Vermilion.

The South Indian type of Veena was introduced at Santiniketan by the court musician of the Maharaja of Pithapuram. Playing on the classical musical instrument revived and in a short time became popular in northern India. The Veena, its musical qualities, and the artistic way of playing, created an intensely aesthetic atmosphere.
The picture was first secured by the Indian Society of Oriental Art and later acquired by the present owner.

PLATE 11

OUT ON A STORMY NIGHT, 1923, Wash Painting, Size 13½" × 9½"

MATERIAL : Japanese Handmade Paper

COLOURS : Indian Red, Yellow Ochre, Burnt Sienna, Indigo, Light Red, Chinese White, Mica, Gold.

Out on a stormy Night is one among the many pictures by the artist first published in the late Ramananda Chatterjee's periodicals, the *Prabashi* and the *Modern Review*. It will not be out of place to refer to Chatterjee's love for and eagerness to help spread the art movement of the new Group. In the early days and for a considerable period these two monthly magazines served practically as the only means of contact with the public. Young artists in distant places got inspiration and new ideas from reproductions in the *Prabashi* and the *Modern Review*.

PLATE 12

MANDIRA DANCE OF KATHIAWAD, April 1923, Ink Work, Size 10¼" × 6"

MATERIAL : Indian Handmade Paper

COLOUR : Chinese Ink.

Rabindranath Tagore, along with a number of professors of Santiniketan, visited Kathiawad in 1923. The folk-songs and folk-dances of Kathiawad impressed the Poet; he desired that boys and girls at Santiniketan should learn them. At the end of his tour, the Poet brought back with him a family of peasants from Kathiawad. A thirteen-year old girl of this family danced in the mango-grove with a pair of *mandira* in each hand.

To what extent this subject attracted Nandalal can be estimated from the fact that he designed many sketches, lithographs (Kala-Bhabana collection) and coloured paintings on this *mandira* dance.

PLATE 13

PWE DANCE, 1924, Tempera, Size 42" × 27½"

MATERIAL : Silk

COLOURS : Yellow Ochre, Chinese White, Chinese Ink, Indian Red.

At an invitation from the Chinese universities in 1924 Rabindranath Tagore, accompanied by a number of Indian scholars made an extensive tour of China and other Far Eastern countries. The goal of the Mission was to renew the old cultural ties which China and other Far Eastern countries had with India and also to work out a constructive scheme of co-operation. The deputation included Kshitimohan Sen Sastri, Professor of Indology, Santiniketan, Nandalal Bose, Head of the Kala-Bhavana, L. K. Elmhirst, Director of Sriniketan and Kalidas Nag from Calcutta University.

On their way the party halted at Rangoon for four days. One evening a Burmese songstress came to provide songs for the guests. Her father accompanied her on a *Saung*, a string instrument. The twelve-year old sister of the musician was a practised Pwe dancer, she was with them. On being requested to give recitals the fair-looking handsome little girl, Ma Dwe, said she had not come prepared. For this national dance, there must have special dress and ornaments. The guests insisted, "We do not want such formal show." A Banarasi *Sari* was available. With the *Sari* on and to the music of her sister and father she performed exquisite dances. Infinitely changing and varied every minute were the graceful movements of her tender blossom-like body, creating beauty in thousand new shapes and forms—sometimes it was like blowing flower, or a creeper swayed by the gentle wind or a rippling river; and sometimes again it was like a bird dancing, a peacock on a cloudy day. Nandalal ceaselessly went on sketching the movements. These forms, the artist said, were inimitably beautiful and hints of these were also found in old Indian sculptures.

One of the items of the dance symbolized the dropping *Shephalika* flower. The picture was painted on Nandalal's return to India. The artist himself mounted it in Japanese style.

PLATE 14

KURUKSHETRA, 1925, Tempera, Size 29½" × 21½"

Material : Cartridge Paper

Colours : Vermilion, Terra Verde, Chinese Ink, Yellow Ochre, Stone White, Lemon Yellow, Emerald Green.

A story from the epic Mahabharata. The Kauravas and the Pandavas after dynastic disputes extending over many years made ready for open combat. As the opposing forces with their allies stood arrayed on the plain of Kurukshetra just before the great war began, Arjuna, the principal Pandava warrior, was overtaken by an intolerable internal conflict. His heart quailed at the thought of the war and the mass murder that it involved including the killing of friends and relatives. What use would be victory gained at such appalling cost ? All the old standards seemed to fail him. Like his heart, the old values were in a state of collapse.

PLATE 15

GURU ABANINDRANATH, August 1926, Tempera, Size 12" × 7¾"

Material : Indian Handmade Paper

Colours : Shell White, Yellow Ochre, Chrome Yellow, Vermilion, Emerald Green, Gold.

The modern art movement in India may be said to have been inaugurated by E. B. Havell. It was through the writings of this great Englishman that the people of India were made aware of the vast significance of the Indian art and its ideal. The pioneer genius who gave form, shape and character to this new ideal was Abanindranath Tagore. Even before Abanindranath came under the influence of Havell's guidance, his mind had been nourished in the atmosphere of literary renaissance. It was Abanindranath who first created the taste for Indian art. Acharya Nandalal was Abanindranath's student and worked for a considerable period under the influence of the latter's genius.

About Abanindranath, Nandalal said, "To call myself a disciple of Abanindranath is but stating a fact. But it leaves very much unsaid. Whatever I am, I know I am only a creation of his. He has created me in the world of Art and in that sense I am like a son unto him. We recognise that the master attracts not so much through his skill in teaching as through his ideal.

A real Guru never imposes himself on his disciple. He always encourages the pupil to develop his power in his own way."

The picture was a birthday gift to his Guru and was exhibited by the Indian Society of Oriental Art in Calcutta.

PLATE 16

DANCING GIRL'S WORSHIP, January 1927, Tempera and Wash, Size 63" × 34"

Material : Silk

Colours : Yellow Ochre, Indian Red, Ultramarine, Chinese Ink, Japanese White.

A scene from Tagore's drama, Dancing Girl's Worship, based on a Buddhist theme. The dancing girl here discards the gorgeous outer dress revealing the *Bhikshuni's* yellow robe. The story unfolds the single-minded devotion to the Buddha of Shrimati, the palace dancer. King Ajatasatru is determined to make the kingdom of Magadha free from Buddhist influence. Undaunted by the king's order prohibiting worship at the Buddhist stupa, Shrimati prepares herself to offer prayers at the shrine, erected during Bimbisara's reign in the royal garden at a spot where the Buddha had sat. With the intention of insulting both Buddha and the dancing girl a royal edict is secured that Shrimati must dance before the Buddhist altar. Beautifully dressed she appears before the stupa. But to the surprise of all, her dance turns out to be an act of worship. She begins to dance. As she dances, she unfastens her ornaments one by one and throws them at the foot of the stupa. Eventually the guard strikes Shrimati who falls down dead.

In the first staging of the drama in Calcutta the artist's eldest daughter appeared in the role of Shrimati and gave a most moving and inspired performance. Nandalal decorated the stage and prepared the costumes for the show. People are not sufficiently aware of Nandalal's original contributions to stage-craft and community festival decorations. The style formerly followed in dress and set had a realistic tendency. The most remarkable trait of the new style developed by him is its universality. Look at his make-ups, the kings, queens, maids, ordinary citizens, robbers or other personnel. You cannot call them as belonging to a particular country or a particular region, yet they do not appear unreal.

PLATE 17

RETURN, February, 1927, Pencil Drawing, Size 81" × 47½"

Material : Cartridge Paper

The painting of this picture provided the artist's mental escape from the bustle of festivities on the occasion of a marriage in his family. Amidst crowds and din he finished it unruffled. It was sold at the one-man show held at Darjeeling. After about two years Tagore wrote a poem on the picture :

When you went far away
Spring's store of joys was not yet spent.

It is scribed in a corner in the Poet's own handwriting.

This is the only pencil drawing of great dimensions by the artist.

PLATE 18

THE STARTING OF THE BRIDEGROOM, November 1928, Tempera, Size 6½" × 4½"

MATERIAL : Nepalese Handmade Paper

COLOURS : Vermilion, Indian Red, Chrome Yellow, Emerald Green, Ultramarine, Chinese White, Chinese Ink.

Nandalal has not painted many pictures in this particular Bengali *Pat* style. After his student days at the Art School, he lived for a period in his ancestral home in the neighbourhood of Calcutta. While there, he painted a number of pictures in the *pat* style and used to give them away to the peasants and working people of the locality for a few annas. About *pat* paintings Nandalal has later said, "Painting develops mannerism when for a long time an object is, invariably through habit, compared to another fixed object. *Pat* is that kind of painting which suffers from the defect of such mannerism. There should be change in manner and technique in accordance with the changing tastes of a nation in the process of time. The artist must himself discover new modes of resemblance and comparison."

Nandalal painted three pictures of this size and style during this time.

PLATE 19

CHAITANYA TEACHING IN HIS SCHOOL, July 1929, Ink Work. Size 8" × 5½"

MATERIAL : Nepalese Handmade Paper

COLOUR : Chinese Ink.

The Great Vaishnava religious teacher, Chaitanya, was born in the year 1485 in Nadia, Bengal. Of Brahmin parentage he received the usual education of a Brahmin boy and, thanks to his extraordinary talents, became, even when he was still in his teens, famous for his proficiency in all branches of Sanskrit knowledge, specially grammar, rhetoric, logic and philosophy. Naturally enough he started a *Tol* (school) where he taught these subjects. This was before he renounced the world and became completely absorbed in his spiritual mission.

PLATE 20

DAUGHTER-IN-LAW, November 1929, Linoprint, Size 7" × 5"

MATERIAL : Nepalese Handmade Paper

From the children's illustrated book *Sahaj Path* by Rabindranath Tagore.

Nandalal's interest in graphic art can be traced from the year 1925. He has not had too many wood-cuts, most of them are done in lino. The *Dandi March* and *Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan* are important specimens of his lino-cuts.

PLATE 21

DANDI MARCH, March 1930, Tempera, Size 15½" × 9¾"

MATERIAL : Teak Wood

COLOURS : Indian Red, Yellow Ochre, Terra Verde, White Stone, Chinese Ink.

In December 1929, the Indian people decided to launch a campaign for Independence. Mahatma Gandhi searched for a form of civil disobedience. On March 2, 1930 he sent a long letter to the Viceroy giving notice that civil disobedience would begin in nine days. In his letter the Mahatma said, "Nothing but organised non-violence can check the organised violence of British Government." "This non-violence," he continued, "will be expressed through civil disobedience for the moment confined to the inmates of the Sabarmati Asram, but ultimately designed to cover all those who choose to join the movement."

The first batch of chosen Satyagrahis numbering 79 hailed from the Punjab, Gujerat, Maharashtra, U.P., Cutch, Sind, Kerala, Rajasthan, Andhra, Karnatak, Bombay, Tamil Nad, Bihar, Bengal, Utkal, Nepal and Fiji. The age of the Satyagrahis varied from sixteen to sixty-one, the oldest being Gandhiji. On March 12, 1930 at 6-30 p.m., with the whole world watching on, Gandhiji started with 78 followers on the historic March to Dandi, 241 miles due south of Sabarmati, to break the Salt Law.

Gandhiji carrying a lacquered staff, one inch wide and 54 inches long with an iron tip, walked the distance in 24 days. Peasants sprinkled the winding dirt roads with water and strewed green leaves on them. From miles around peasants gathered to kneel by the roadside as the Satyagrahis passed.

Gandhiji and all the 78 followers are in the picture. Nandalal also painted during these days some posters which were utilized by the Civil Disobedience movement. The police used to tear them down at sight.

The same subject has been treated in lino-cut,—in the black-and-white version the background with small figures has been omitted.

PLATE 22

ROAD TO BOLPUR, May 1934, Tempera, Size 21" × 13½"

MATERIAL: Handmade paper

COLOURS: Yellow Ochre, Indian Red, Terra Verde, Chinese Ink, Stone White.

Before painting frescoes in the Santiniketan hospital buildings, Nandalal made some preliminary paintings for showing his students how to work. This is one of those.

During the sowing and harvesting seasons, landless Santhal peasants are called away to different parts of the district. For a month or two during these seasons, Santhal peasants with their families, wives and children, move to distant places for earning a living. Groups of Santhal peasants, who have left their homesteads in search of work in distant villages, are seen trudging along the road to Bolpur running by the side of Santiniketan.

PLATE 23

PINE FOREST, June 1938, Dry Point, Size 7½" × 4¾"

Pine forest of Tagdah Valley, Darjeeling.

The artist's interest in etching came rather late in his life. He worked in this branch of art hardly for ten years. But within this short period he has produced works of a very high order. This composition of the *Pine Forest* was later on interpreted in a painting.

PLATE 24

SHRIMATI AND MALATI, April 1942, *Executed directly on plaster-wall in egg medium, Size* 48″ × 36″

Colours: Gold, Brown Ochre, Indian Red, Terra Verde, White Ink.

Some of the principal episodes of the Buddhist ballad, the *Dancing Girl's Worship* (see note on Plate 16) have been painted in a fresco in the Cheenabhavana of Santiniketan.

If this fresco is divided into three sections, it will be seen that in each of the first two sections, there are two episodes. In the third, three episodes in succession have been painted.

In the first, Shrimati is proceeding with the sacred offering in her hands. In the second, appear Shrimati and Malati. Shrimati is singing; Malati, a village-maiden, is listening. Malati communicates to Shrimati her wish to be employed in looking after the sacred altar in the royal garden.

In the next, i.e. the second section of the fresco, there is the palace scene. In the first episode, there is the meeting between Lokeswari, Maharaja Bimbisara's wife, and the Buddhist nun (*Bhikshuni*) Utpalparna. The second episode shows the monk (*Bhikshu*) Upali receiving alms from the hands of Shrimati in the royal palace. Princess Ratnavali is protesting against this alms-giving. On bended knees Shrimati is paying her respects to Upali. The princesses are entertaining themselves with songs and music.

The first picture in the third section shows the procession of the princesses with sacred offerings moving in the direction of the altar under the Asoka tree. In the second picture, Shrimati appears in her dancing costume; she is to dance, according to the royal order, before the altar under the *Asoka* tree. Women-guards stand behind her.

In the third picture, a single event is portrayed in a series of scenes. Carrying in both hands a plate with burning lamps set on it, Shrimati's song and dance begin. Bimbisara's wife, Queen Lokeswari, looks on grief-stricken, hiding her face behind a pillar; some in anguish are weeping, their hands covering their eyes. The altar is decked in a garland of lamps. Before the altar, with each movement of her worshipful dance Shrimati casts off her dancer's costume, and offers up her ornaments. At last she is seen in the saffron robe of a Buddhist nun. At the foot of the altar, the black mass of her hair together with the crown she lays down as offering.

In the last scene the big broad disc of the setting sun is seen on the horizon. It looks like a Buddhist mound (*stupa*). The background is threaded with a forest-line; on the left hand side stand three giant trees, tall and straight. The whole scene is suffused with the saffron light of the setting sun. In the foreground, Shrimati's lifeless saffron-clad body hangs in the hand of a woman-guard.

Different versions of scenes from the *Dancing Girl's Worship* have been depicted by the artist in frescoes, line-drawings and paintings. Besides the Cheenabhavana frescoes, he executed this story both in Baroda Kirti Mandir and in the Santiniketan Library building. The latter work was done in Jaipur method.

PLATE 25

BURNING PINE, June 1942, Painted in body colour, Size 33½″ × 20½″

Material : Nepalese Handmade Paper.

Colours : Yellow Ochre, Indian Red, Terra Verde, Chinese Ink, White.

Painted during the artist's stay at Almora. A giant old pine tree stood by the roadside on the way to Mayavati. Somebody had touched it with a burning cigarette—and the resinous gum in a scar on the body of the tree had caught fire. Month after month the wounded tree continued to burn. The giant tree was on fire and it burnt on helplessly. Sightseers used to come and see the strange spectacle of the tree on fire. Nandalal felt deeply hurt at the sight of the tree burning within itself slowly. Nandalal had been at Almora for a good long period. During this period, he said in the course of a talk at Mayavati Advaita Asrama, "Born in a Hindu family, I have been brought up in Hindu ideas and practices. At one time I used to paint mostly pictures of gods and goddesses. Now, however, I paint pictures of ordinary everyday life as well as pictures of deities and both equally delight me. Conceiving the images of divinity alone is lofty and the images of ordinary things around us are trifling, so I had thought in the past. In my past days I saw divinity only in the images of deities; now I try to see it in man, in trees and mountains."

PLATE 26

MOUNTAIN MIST, May 1945, Tempera, Size 33½″ × 20½″

Material : Nepalese Handmade Paper

Colours : Emerald Green, Burnt Sienna, Chinese Ink, Stone White, Cobalt Blue, Indian Red, Terra Verde.

A morning scene from Darjeeling town.

PLATE 27

A SANTHAL MARRIAGE PROCESSION, May 1948, Line Drawing, Size 10¼″ × 8¼″

Material : Silk

About the evolution of his life as an artist Nandalal has written, "I was born in a far away village in Bihar. There my boyhood was spent in seclusion. The mud-huts and humble grain stores of peasants, farms and broad paddy-fields and low-lying ranges of hills formed my surroundings. In Santiniketan around me there were reddish-brown earth and at intervals rows of *Sal* and palm trees; small Santhal hamlets lying scattered over the wide, sparsely populated land. The Santhals were my neighbours; I mixed with them as one of them and they also took me as their kin."

PLATE 28

STORM, July 1948, Touch Work, Size 13″ × 8″

Material : Nepalese Handmade Paper

The artist's inclination towards ink and brush was apparent during 1916-18. But till 1930 he had not adopted this method for serious works. One of his most important works, *Mahaprasthaner Pathey* (Sarabhai Collection) shows his mastery over ink and brush. There are numerous landscapes and seascapes that are unrivalled in the whole realm of modern Indian art. The painting reproduced here is a typical specimen of the artist's latest style of work.

PLATE 29
SPRING FESTIVAL, March 1949, Tempera, Size 27" × 16½"
MATERIAL : Nepalese Handmade Paper
COLOURS : Yellow Ochre, Terra Verde, Chinese Ink, Stone White, Indian Red.

Characteristics of the artist's latest style are apparent in the picture—restricted colour, free brush work and simplicity. We meet with this style of simplified form and composition and experiments involving proportion and balance about the year 1934. The inspiration for these works is traceable to direct and more intimate contact with nature. There is basic link between post-1934 paintings and the artist's sketches and studies. Those, generally, are complete in sets only. For instance, *Spring Festival* with *Evening* and *Summer Noon* constitutes one such set. There is a uniformity in treatment evident in *Sabari in Youth, Sabari in Middle Age* and *Sabari in Old Age* and also in *Hazaribagh Road* and *Tagdah Valley*.

The cover design is made from the line drawing done by Nandalal for the fresco he later on executed on a Sriniketan building wall. The *Halakarshana Festival* of 1928 was rendered in fresco in the same year by the artist assisted by his students.

Dates Given In Plates : When not quite certain dates have been put in brackets.

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NANDALAL BOSE